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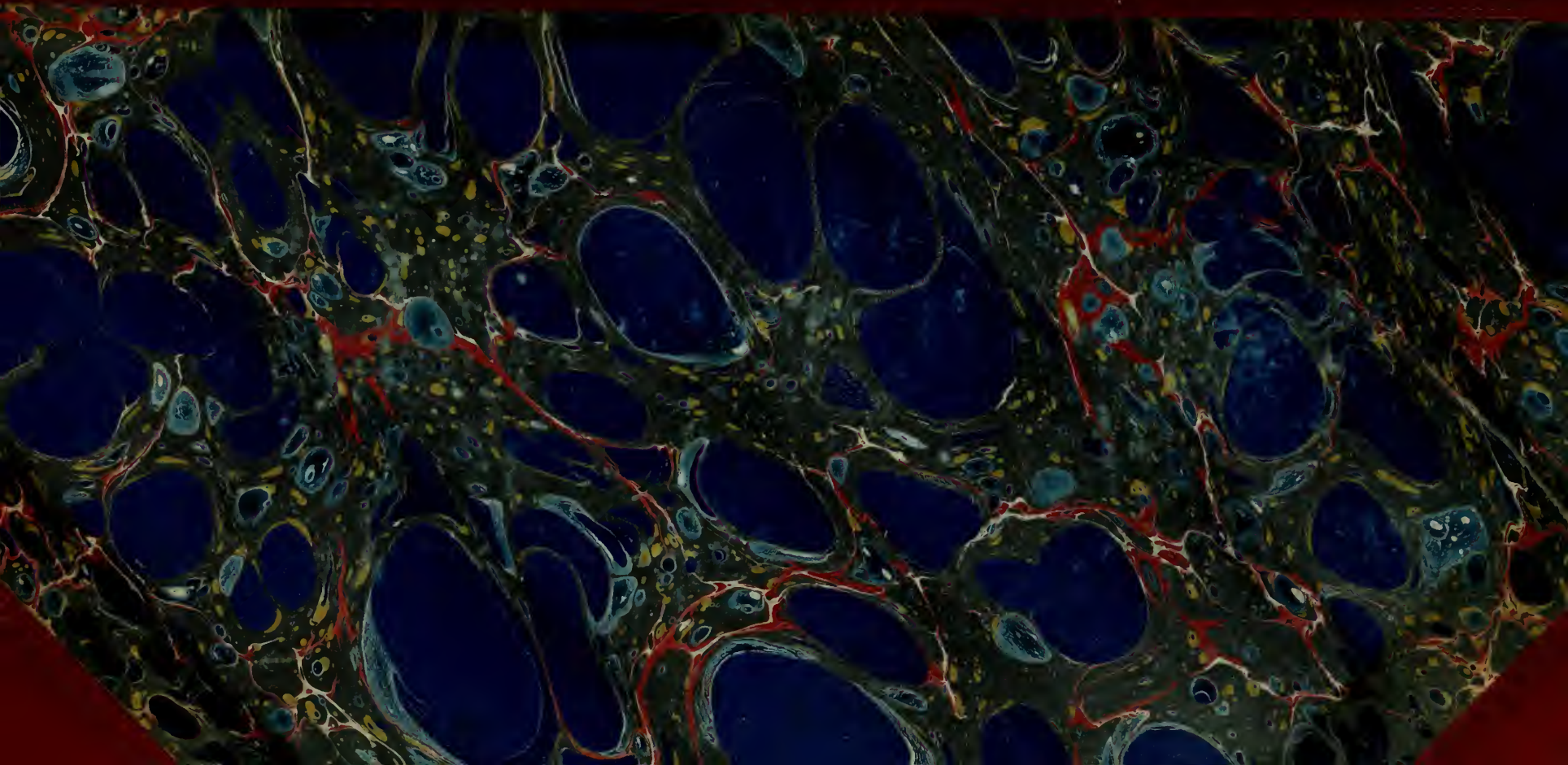

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B. AND E. TAYLOR. ROBERT BARNES.

SUDDENLY A TURN IN THE ROAD BROUGHT HIM FACE TO FACE WITH A YOUNG LADY.

*"Laden with Golden Grain."*

THE

# ARGOSY.

EDITED BY

## MRS. HENRY WOOD.

VOLUME XXXIII.

*January to June*, 1882.

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# THE ARGOSY.

*JANUARY*, 1882.

## MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

### CHAPTER I.

#### AT THE WHITE HART.

THE mid-day train from London, through the south-western counties, had just passed Ravenstoke Station. It was one of the quietest stations on that line; only two passengers had alighted.

One, who stepped from a first-class carriage, was an acute-looking elderly gentleman, with iron-grey hair, who carried a brief-bag in his hand. He went briskly up the narrow hilly footpath from the station, looking to the right hand and the left like one whose business it was to see all there was to be seen.

The other was a third-class passenger, and she was a small, slight girl, certainly not more than twenty years old. She was very plainly and simply dressed—she might even have been called shabby, but for the careful preservation of her garments, and the freshness of the white frills about her neck and wrists. Her face, too, was sweet and pure and bright; not strikingly pretty, perhaps, in the eyes of such as prefer dahlias to lilies, not a face to rave about, but a face alive in every feature to the gentle motions of a true and innocent soul.

The gentleman had walked straight through the station. The girl lingered, and then spoke to the homely old station-master.

"Is there any hotel or inn near here, where you can recommend me to go and get some lunch, and where I could remain for the night, if I find it necessary?"

The old man looked at the girl. "You go to the White Hart, miss. You'll be well looked after there. They are kind folk. It's the station hotel, d'ye see. Everybody who has to wait at Raven stoke puts up there. You'll find it quiet and comfortable."

But the girl hesitated. "I am afraid it may be expensive," she

said. "Is there any humbler place—a little farther off, maybe—which you could recommend?"

"No, no," answered the old man, resolutely. "There's the Pitchfork, but I'll not send you there. The folks are decent enough in their own way, but it's not the place for you. Go you to the White Hart, and if you set about things the right way you won't find it dear. They are good people."

"Thank you for telling me this so kindly," said the young lady as she turned away.

The White Hart was a snug, old-fashioned hostelry, crammed full of fine old furniture, bought up at the best county sales held during the last fifty years. Its proprietors were old servants of one of the county families, and its attendants were demure, buxom country lasses. The landlady was a little grand and awful generally, especially to unknown and unaccompanied lady-visitors; but her frowning brows relaxed, and her pursy mouth softened, as our little traveller timidly asked if she could be served with some sort of simple meal—such as a cup of tea and a little cold meat.

"Certainly, miss," said Mrs. Fisher, with one swift glance over the stranger's modest toilet, and a mental decision that she would not care to be taxed with the charge for a private room. "Mary, show this young lady into the coffee-room. You'll find it very quiet and pleasant, miss," she added kindly. "There's only one gentleman lunching here to-day; he is just come in off the train."

"Will you tell me where the post-office is?" asked the girl again. "I should like to go there while I am waiting."

"It's a good bit away," answered Mrs. Fisher. "You see, the White Hart and the station stand by themselves, and the post-office is nearer the other houses of the village. One of our lasses is going there now with the London letters; so if you'd like her to do anything for you, you're welcome, and it will save you the step."

"Oh, thank you," said the girl. "Will you tell her to ask if any letter is waiting there for Miss Alice Cleare. Please ask her to make quite certain, because I think there is sure to be one."

"There won't be any mistake," returned the landlady. "There's not such a many strangers' letters in Ravenstoke office: and though the postmistress is slow, she's sure."

Alice Cleare followed the serving girl into the big coffee-room. It was a pleasant enough chamber, with brown wainscoted walls hung out with hunting pieces, a huge sideboard covered with plate and glass, great windows quite bowery with beautiful plants of all kinds, and a long shining table, on one end of which a snowy cloth was already spread. Its other occupant was ensconced in a roomy arm-chair, and was already deep in the interests of the county paper, which he held aside for a moment as they entered. The maid spread a small cloth at the opposite end of the table and silently disappeared.

There was nothing for the young traveller to while the time with. She almost wished she had persisted in going herself to the post-office. The girl had a sore and anxious heart, and mute waiting seemed almost more than she could bear.

Presently her fellow-sojourner rose, walked to the fireplace, and began examining the prints above it. Then he suddenly remarked that it was a very hot day for so late in the season, and offered her the newspaper, which she thankfully accepted.

His lunch was not long in coming—a dainty little lunch of cold chicken. He asked if the wine cellar could recommend its hock, and the maid said she would call her master. The host came speedily : a quiet, civil-speaking elderly man of rather sleepy manners. He could recommend his hock : and brought some.

"Beautiful place, this Ravenstoke," observed the visitor. "One would not expect such perfect seclusion so near London."

"You might well say that, if you saw what it is in the winter, sir," said Mr. Fisher.

"Many county families living near?"

"A goodish many," answered the host. "Lord Weald's place isn't three miles off, but they're not very often there. This climate does not suit my lady."

"Does Lord Weald own the land hereabouts?—capital land it is."

"Law, no, sir, the Ravens are the squires of Ravenstoke. They've been on the land, sir, ever since King William Rufus gave it as a grant to the first Raven, who had helped him in clearing the New Forest. The Ravens are the family here, sir."

"I suppose they'll be quiet-going folk—not very rich," said the gentleman, indifferently.

"Why, sir, they're as rich as rich can be. As for quiet-going, they've always been that in my time : but there's some old residents here who could tell other tales. There wasn't a kinder man than the late Squire, sir. He was liked by all."

"Ha!" said the stranger, looking up, as if his interest had suddenly awakened. "Didn't he die lately? or was there a monument erected to him—or some public event of some sort—what was it? I seem to recall seeing something of the kind in a London paper."

"There was his funeral," said the host, impressively ; "the county papers were full of it, as was right and proper. Did it get into the London papers, sir? That'll be some of the doings of the new Squire's friends."

"I suppose the old family is in no danger of dying out?"

The landlord shook his head. "There's no saying, sir," he answered. "They were terribly afeared of that once. The Squire has died before his time, one may say—for so robust a man as he was; he did not see his fiftieth year, and was not spared to see his children marry. So there's just the two sons left, and one of them's not much to look at in the way of health."

"He ought to be, in such a place as this," said the stranger.

"It is the new squire, Mr. Leonard. He never went away, even to school; he was so delicate. They had tutors down here for him, and he is very clever. We don't think much of him in the village; he is not like his father was, always going about among folks, or like Master Frank, the younger son, who takes after the old squire's ways, and is one of the nicest young fellows you ever saw, sir. Yet by the Squire's will he is not to get a brass farthing to call his own until his mother dies."

"No!"

The landlord looked grave. "We can't make out the rights and wrongs of it, sir, and it seems hard to us. But the gentry have their own ways, sir—as they've a right to."

"Is the mother—the lady—a good life?" asked the traveller. "Perhaps it was a mutual arrangement? I can't imagine a young man feeling the want of cash while his mother is wealthy."

"Master Frank was not her favourite; *he* was never kept from school, sir," cried the landlord significantly. "Ladies are mysterious. Women all are—as my wife herself doesn't deny. The Squire was powerful fond of his younger son—and I've heard say that the two parents seldom take most to the same child—which is a blessed arrangement o' nature, when one thinks over it. So the Squire must have had his reasons."

"Perhaps the young gentleman was a little wild," suggested the stranger, carelessly. "His father may have felt he was doing him a service by imposing years of discipline and dependence."

"May be so, sir; but Master Frank never seemed wild to my knowledge; and people that keep houses like this, sir, are apt to know a good deal."

"Well, I've no doubt the mother will act fairly by him."

"I daresay she will, sir. She's a very pious woman, though not popular as the Squire was. Some people say she's hard and highty-tighty. But there's one thing speaks well for Madame Raven: she keeps her servants. She's got one still that was nurse to the late Squire himself when he was brought to Ravenstoke."

"Was he not born here, then?"

"No, sir. The squire before him, Squire Eldred Raven, never married, and his nephew, little Henry, was brought here, a child, from India. Charity Hale—Mrs. Hale that is, as she's called—nursed him, and a fine man he grew up. She is at the house still, though it's little she can do, being nigh her three score and ten."

"I suppose you don't remember the former squire," carelessly remarked the stranger.

"I don't remember him," said the landlord. "I hadn't come to these parts in Squire Eldred's days; it's a many years ago. But there's them that do. There's a moniment to him in the church, sir. They do say it was a nine-days' wonder what the inscription would be, if they

wanted to speak a good word for him, and yet tell no stories. But he's dead and gone long since, that reckless Squire Eldred : and, in the main, the family has been a good family—with feeling hearts. But it cuts me to see how Mr. Frank is broke down by his father's death. He was away when it took place, leastways he came flying home from Cambridge after the Squire was insensible.——I beg pardon, sir, for troubling you so long with my talk," the host wound up briskly, seeing his guest had drawn some papers from his pocket and seemed to be paying him no further attention.

But he had had another attentive auditor : Miss Alice Cleare. She had heard every word, and was thinking to herself how full of sorrow the world was, and how hearts nearly as sore as her own were beating in this beautiful country place—which had seemed to her a paradise of peace and prosperity.

As the landlord went away, a maid-servant came in with the small luncheon-tray. On its corner lay a letter : which the young lady caught up eagerly.

If anybody had asked her, half an hour before, what she feared or expected, she would have answered almost in the words of the note she now read. Yet it is only when a dreaded fact is realised, that we discover how large a place hope has held in our anxiety.

She bore the blow bravely—whatever it was. Neither the strange gentleman nor the maid had any reason to imagine that the note was anything but some business-like appointment or excuse. Alice Cleare had had a great deal of sorrow in her short life. It had not hardened her. But she had learned how to meet it.

When she had finished her lunch, which she did very quickly—and, indeed, she took little except the cup of tea—instead of ringing the bell, she went to the door of the coffee-room and looked out into the hall. The landlady was seated at work behind the long window of her little parlour. Advancing towards her, she inquired what she owed. It was little enough.

"I may require to sleep here to-night," she said, timidly. "I have some business to do in this neighbourhood, and circumstances may detain me till the last train has left. Must I engage a room now, to secure it? Or is there a reasonable prospect of my getting one, if I leave it open till I see how things happen?"

"Poor little body!" thought the landlady as she answered. "You're quite sure to get a room here, miss, if you come in any time before eleven, when we shut up ; and I reckon you'll not be nearly so late as that," she added, with an old-fashioned motherly horror of young folks straying in the darkness.

"I may be rather late.—I may not be able to help it—but oh, surely not later than that!" said the girl. "I shall certainly return as soon as ever I can. And will you please give that"—it was a sixpence—"to the messenger who brought my letter for me."

"There's no need," said the landlady, "the girl would have been

going to the post anyhow. But as you please." For she saw the sweet face flushed, and the delicate lip trembled. Alice Cleare's dress might be cheap and worn—but it was not in small dues to others that she had learned to economise.

She set off briskly down the highroad in the direction of the church and the village. The strange gentleman then came out of the coffee-room, paid his reckoning, and inquired whether the village lay to the right or to the left of the hotel. The landlady went with him to the threshold, secretly wondering which of her neighbours he had come to see, and what he wanted with them. She was shrewder than her husband, and she guessed he was a lawyer.

Miss Cleare's slight figure was already far off, a mere dark speck on the horizon. But advancing towards the hotel, so that he must have passed her on his way, was a tall, fair youth, in deep mourning. He walked leisurely, as if going nowhere in particular. And presently he paused, hesitated a moment, and then retraced his steps.

"Is that young man one of these Ravens your good husband has been telling me about?" asked the stranger.

"Yes, sir; that's Mr. Frank, the second son."

Now, the landlady was right in believing this gentleman to be a lawyer; and, in fact, his business lay with the Ravens of Ravenscourt, until now strangers to him. He had an appointment for an interview in their house that very evening. He had named the time for this meeting himself, and not without design had he made it some hours later than the coming down of the train from London. For he was on a bit of new business in this matter—business, too, quite out of his usual line. But, as he had said to his partner, it was always something to get into relations with a good county family, only it was as well to find out how the land lay. And for this survey, whether it was to be of acres or of histories, he had deemed no place better suited than the old-established, snug White Hart. Now he was on his way to stroll about a little and see what was to be seen.

"A London lawyer, I'm certain," said Mrs. Fisher to herself. "Is he come about Squire Raven's strange will, I wonder? He's quite another sort from good old Mr. Brackenbury, who has done all the law business the Court has wanted for the last thirty years. I wonder if it was the sight of him, standing here, that made Master Frank turn back?"

## CHAPTER II.

### MOTHER AND SONS.

Frank Raven had never noticed the stranger at the hotel door. His original intention had been to visit the hotel: at least as far as a vague whim can be called an intention. There had seemed nothing to do at home, or anywhere else. So he had just strolled out, with

some idea of having a chat with old Fisher, the landlord. It might have ended in ordering a mild glass of something or other. One is apt to resort to such things when aimless and unhappy.

He had sauntered out through the great gates of Ravenscourt, and on between the heavy-eaved cottages dotted along the winding road that led to grey ivied Ravenstoke Church, with its ancient elms meeting over the lych gate.

He thought of his father's funeral-day as he passed that lych gate. Through it all the Ravens of many generations had been carried, borne between the white graves in the plebeian sunshine to the exclusiveness of their patrician vaults. Their epitaphs were everywhere about the church: on great square tombs, where knights and dames reposed in sculptured devotion; on scrolls held aloft by fat little cherubs; on plain tablets and on half-worn brasses. A new monument would be there soon—workmen were already putting up a scaffolding for it under the great south window; and the black velvet draped about pulpit and pew was there in remembrance of his father! It smote Frank's heart with a dull, heavy pain. A little longer, and then even this last outward sign of the lost love would vanish!

It was the first time that death had ever really entered young Frank Raven's life, though the names of five little brothers and sisters were recorded on a white marble slab hard by where the new monument would stand. They had all passed from existence before Frank came into it. Of all the seven children, this youngest lad, Frank, was the only one who had seemed born with any chance of life. All the others had budded with the blight upon them. Leonard, the weakly eldest, was the only one who lived. He had unexpectedly struggled through a puny childhood, through a sickly youth, to something like the normal standard of health. Nobody had expected it. For years the Ravenstoke people had openly looked on the hardy little Frank as the heir, not believing that the elder could live; and perhaps it was a secret feeling of the same sort, or it might be a father's natural pride in the child who delighted to share his open-air interests and pursuits, which had led the late Squire Raven to allow Frank to grow up in the large liberty and unspecific culture of a country gentleman, scarcely befitting the position of a younger son. Frank was sent to college at last, but it was scarcely as a working student. Riding with the harriers, and dabbling in farming and local politics, does not prepare one for classes and libraries. What had the Squire really intended? Probably he did not know himself. He was an easy-going man, who always felt there was plenty of time for everything. But then one day he died. And Leonard Raven reigned in his stead.

Mrs. Raven was a sickly, yellow-faced woman, in whose poor thin blood lurked the fatal taint which had wrought the havoc among the olive-branches round the Raven table. She had ever doted on the boy Leonard, her first-born, to whose ailing life she had ministered de-

votedly; to whom she had been ever gentle and forbearing, however pettish or indifferent to others. Surely it must have been for his sake that she had seemed to grudge her husband's love for Frank; though when dawning health had allowed Leonard to join a little in masculine pursuits, she had turned very jealous lest the Squire should supplant her in her eldest son's affections.

It had been but a dry, chilled household life which had been lived at Ravenscourt. Husband and wife had never quarrelled; had never had, as the common saying holds, "one harsh word between them." They had never drawn near enough to make collision possible. The Squire had the warmer nature, and felt that his genuine indifference wronged his wife, and so tried to make it up to her by a voluntary submission to all her whims. Also he thought Mrs. Raven was a very good, pious woman, since he knew he was not a religious man, and felt her to be in so many ways his very opposite. He was always restive under the Vicar's sermons, and could not help slinking off to the stables on Sunday afternoons. But his wife went to every church service, and sat for hours with dry and dismal books before her. And the Squire unconsciously held the pagan idea that one set of people can be put apart to "do" the religion for others. He hoped his wife was "doing" it for him. And whoever is once seen in that false light, soon acquires a subtle power, which steadily overcomes the might of right, and the force of natural affections.

In exact proportion as Mrs. Raven had adored and petted Leonard, she had snubbed and spited Frank. And she had not done this candidly. She had seemed more ashamed than many mothers are of the palpable partiality of her maternal affection. And so she had striven to show cause for it. At her select parties she had shaken her head, and dropped Frank solemnly out of her conversation, so that the ladies had wondered and whispered.

Of course, it had not been wholesome for Frank to find himself thus, from his childhood upwards, placed in the sinner's seat. The sense of injustice had stirred the depths of his honest nature; had perhaps added an edge of riotousness to the innocent spirits of youth, and a dash of defiance to its healthy freedom. Just before Frank left home for Cambridge, he had noticed his father showed an unwonted anxiety, and had even spoken seriously of his future. Frank thought over all this now, as he sauntered through the Ravenstoke lanes. And he had remembered it all on that dismal afternoon when his father's will was read.

How vividly that will-reading would rise before his mind! The whole household had been gathered in the dining-room, and the old family solicitor, Mr. Brackenbury, had gone through the document with the manner of a man forced to do his professional duty on lines which he does not quite understand and does not at all approve.

Of course all the real estate passed to the elder son. But the whole of the personal property, with the exception of a few trifling

legacies, was left to the widow for life, and after her decease to Frank absolutely; for his present welfare there was no more definite provision than a discretionary power on the part of the widow to provide for the maintenance and advancement in life of her younger son. The widow and the heir were the executors of the will, and Leonard Raven and the Vicar of Ravenstoke were trustees for Mrs. Raven and Frank.

An awful pause had followed. Then the widow gave a little cough behind her handkerchief—a queer little cough. The lawyer rattled over the remaining repetitions of "executors, administrators, and assigns," and the fate of the house of Ravenstoke was settled for another generation.

Next had followed the rustle of departure, otherwise silent. Too silent it had seemed for Mrs. Raven. She had rather that Frank had protested, had given her an opportunity for self-vindication. Why did she feel guilty enough to need it? At the door she put out her hand to him and spoke.

"Your poor papa must have acted for your best interests."

That was the hardest moment the lad had yet known. He would have despised himself had he touched her hand then, and yet it was not for any tangible wrong that was done him that his heart was bitter. It was only his father whom he wanted! If he could but have gone to him and learned why he did it, and how he came to do it, he would have been satisfied, though the wrong had remained. But the gate of the grave was closed between father and son. For the first time in his thoughtless life, Frank had realised something of the irrevocableness of death. He had turned from his mother with a choking sob, and hurried from the room. Life since then had meant just rising and taking meals, and sauntering about the house and grounds. Not a word had been said of his return to Cambridge. Mother and brother seemed alike to shun him. These were not cheering thoughts for an autumn ramble.

Suddenly a turn in the road had brought him face to face with a young lady. She was within a few paces of him, yet far enough off to give him time to see that she was a stranger—for he knew all the faces round about, certainly the faces of those above the commonest peasant rank.

"What a lovely face!" he thought, and then forgot all about the loveliness in observing that her cheeks were wet, and her lips trembling.

She did not appear to notice him. Her eyes were set straight before her, and though, as she swiftly passed him, he saw they were brimful with still rising tears, they nevertheless looked bright and clear, like sunshine coming out before a storm is over.

How lightly and resolutely she walked! What was her sorrow, he wondered. She was younger than he was, and how much weaker; and yet she did not seem daunted.

He would have liked to turn and look at her again; but it seemed like an insult to her loneliness and her grief. But why need he go on? He was really going nowhere and to do nothing. Why should he visit the White Hart? He might as well go back.

And that was why he turned, and so he followed on Alice Cleare's steps—far off—watching the slight figure on its rapid progress. As she passed Ravenscourt, he saw her turn her head, and look down the avenue; but she did not pause even for an instant.

Frank himself passed towards home through the open gateway. The avenue opened into a circular clearing surrounded by a belt of trees. In this clearing stood the house of Ravenscourt, and gardeners were at work among the fair flower-beds overlooked by the roomy bay-windows of the great drawing-room. Frank thought he would go to see what the men were about. The typical Raven nature always went to see what everybody was about, as those are apt to do whose mere presence is counted an honour, and whose suggestions come as commands.

They were turning up the ground—to Frank's surprise. These beds had always been filled with stocks, mignonette, pansies, and such good old-fashioned flowers. Elsewhere, in the terrace garden behind the house, in the great greenhouse and the little greenhouse, Mrs. Raven had been free to practise her more advanced horticulture; but the Squires had kept these beds as they had been ever since they were first planted by an ancestress—a Dorothy Raven, secluded in half-craziness after her lover was killed at Naseby. Frank stood looking.

The old gardener coughed as he broke the silence. "Fine weather for our work, Master Frank."

"Very pleasant afternoon," Frank answered mechanically.

"But I'm not as young as I have been; I feel that more nor ever to-day," said the man. "While you're let go on in the old ways you can go, but when you're pulled up and started afresh, it's an up-hill job. Why is it hard to take up these pansies and these other pretty late flowers and put down these chrysanthemums? But when you've been planting pansies in the very same spot for forty year, there is a differ, Mr. Frank, and though I can't argufy it out, I feels it all the same."

"But who told you to plant chrysanthemums in the Dorothy beds?" asked Frank breathlessly.

The old man looked up knowingly. "Them's the orders I got from Mr. Leonard," he said, falling into a mechanical tone belied by his twinkling old eyes.

Frank ground his heel into the moist gravel, and turned hastily away towards the house. It was but a little, little thing: yet it stood typical as the end of the past.

He strode through the hall to the dining-room. He thought it would be empty; but his mother was there, standing in her heavy

widow's dress, filling a Wedgewood vase from a basket of hot-house flowers. Frank would have retreated, but her call detained him.

"They are altering the Dorothy beds. Leonard wishes it, and the change might as well be made at once," she said in an excusing tone, but rather as one who has acquiesced than originated.

"My brother has a right to do what he chooses," answered Frank, half misled by her manner. "I did not think he cared much what went on in the garden."

The widow feelingly shook her head. "Leonard could not put on raptures over carnations and mignonette," she sighed; "but he has always taken an interest in my rarer plants."

Frank, deep in his sad thoughts, unconsciously began to whistle softly.

"Oh fie, my dear!" rebuked Mrs. Raven: "your poor father has not yet been a month in his grave. And he used to think you were fond of him!"

Frank did not retort; he went out of the room, and upstairs to his chamber, taking up a letter for himself that lay on the hall-table. It was from the Vicar of Ravenstoke, and it invited him to dine at the Vicarage, and spend the evening there. Frank felt glad to go. Any change was for the better, for the lamplight evenings at the Court were very long and dreary now.

When about to start Frank looked into the drawing-room, and told his mother where he was going. Surely even she could not sigh over the levity of a visit to his pastor and trustee! It was well, perhaps, that he could not hear her remarks to her eldest son, as they stood together watching him go down the avenue.

"Poor Frank! Anything for him—except his own home! You see it yourself, don't you, Leonard?"

"Well, mother, according to you, it's not unnatural," said Leonard. "According to *you*, remember," he added with emphasis. "For I persist in thinking you are on a wild-goose chase."

Mrs. Raven shook her head.

"And why shouldn't he go to the Vicarage?" added the young Squire. "I am glad of it—for I think Toynbee quite understands that I don't want any idler here, and he will advise Frank accordingly. Besides, I should have thought you might be glad to get him out of the way this evening."

"Leonard, Leonard! How can you speak so?"

"Well, it's the plain truth," said Leonard. And, looking at the young man, one could see that he was one of those people with whom truth is generally plain—indeed, ugly—and who find a particular pleasure in its unpleasantness. "If Frank thinks to stay at home and play the gentleman, he is mistaken. The sooner he chooses some suitable employment and enters upon it, the better it will be for his own interest. Idle men are apt to fall into mischief."

"Is he to return to Cambridge?"

"Not with my consent. You can send him if you like. In my opinion no time should be lost in his entering upon some useful career. I don't care how soon he leaves my house. It's not pleasant to be reminded at every trick and turn by outsiders that Frank had all my father's affection and I none of it."

Mrs. Raven sighed. Frank had all the open-heartedness, the free-handed generosity of the Ravens; Leonard had none of it. He was narrow-minded as his mother; fretful in temper. The one son was generally disliked; the other universally admired and loved. No wonder Leonard had become deeply jealous of his brother and wanted him away from Ravenstoke; no wonder, either, with his defects of disposition and of health, that his speech should be habitually crabbed, often discourteous.

"I suppose we may trust this Mr. Dewe to keep his appointment?" resumed Mrs. Raven in a low voice.

"I reckon so," replied Leonard. "Lawyers in general do keep one when a good address is given, where there has lately been a death."

Mrs. Raven did not wince at the cold words. She spoke again half-pleadingly.

"You really think I had better not see him myself at this first interview?"

"Certainly I do," said Leonard. "You might only confuse him. Lawyers hate to do business with women, rely upon that, mother. They want facts, not fancies."

"There is very little fact to go upon," she whispered as to herself. "You know all I can tell, Leonard. I can trust you, my darling. And you won't forget my suggestion about the advertisement, will you? See if he thinks that it is a good idea."

"You must not be offended if he thinks it absurd——and the whole matter with it," retorted her son.

"Do you expect he will refuse to take up the quest?"

"No," said Leonard. "He will see that his fees are safe, and he'll know the more foolish it is, the longer it is likely to last."

"I know you scorn me for these fancies——as you deem them to be," she meekly said.

"I do, mother: and I assure you I have given in to them with reluctance. It is pity that I feel, though, rather than scorn. I believe them to be pure hallucination—the result of a fever-dream."

"Ah no, Leonard. Do not, do not let me think I am acting absolutely against your will in pursuing them. Say that, at least, Leonard, my dear."

"What you are doing, you do with your own money, mother," answered the young man.

Poor woman! If she had ever loved anybody in the world, it was this son; and this was his return! These cold words, this semi-blame!

"Of course, right is right," said Leonard in a more conciliatory

tone, for he did not wish to gratuitously vex her. "At any rate, it should be put at rest, one way or the other: I concede that much. I do not want an interloper in the place where I am master."

## CHAPTER III

### IN THE MOONLIGHT.

THE Vicarage was at a considerable distance from the Court. It was a modest brown building, covered with ivy, and full of large low rooms and unexpected cupboards. It stood upon the western margin of the churchyard, to which its garden opened by a private gate. The oriel window of the Vicar's study overlooked the graves of his flock, while the dining-room enjoyed the more cheerful sunset aspect. The drawing-room was at the end of the house farthest from the road, and except for an occasional airing, it was generally kept shut up and locked, for there had been no lady in the Vicarage since the Vicar's mother had died nearly twenty years ago. The Reverend Jasper Toynbee was a genial man, and he greeted Frank warmly.

They went through their meal cheerily enough, enlivened by the Vicar's own humorous anecdotes of hunt or election. The parlour-maid, in spruce green gown and lilac-trimmed cap, was not required to perform her duties like the automata who wore the Raven livery.

"I prefer that she smiles when I say a funny thing," the old Vicar had always answered, when any guest had deprecated such licence on the part of a waiting-maid. "If she could keep grave for ceremony's sake, I should fear my visitors only laughed for the same. I'm one of the good old school, and am not afraid to make a friend of my servant."

It was only when the table was cleared, and the Vicar and his guest were dallying with their wine-glasses, that there crept into the room the silence which reveals that some serious purpose lurks behind the veil of social intercourse. Each was aware that the other looked at him when his own eyes were averted. Each frank nature was sensible of painful and unaccustomed restraint. But this could not last, and the Vicar broke the silence.

"Frank, my boy, I presume you have some idea why your father left his affairs in so peculiar—and, I may say, so uncomfortable a manner?"

Frank's blue eyes looked up astonished. That his father had some good reason for his will he had not permitted himself to doubt, but it had not before occurred to him that onlookers were likely to suspect definite reasons of grave significance, not, of course, to his credit.

"I suppose he thought it safest not to trust me too much. Did he say anything about it to you, sir?"

A cautious man, anxious to discover how far some offence of his own lay a buried secret between himself and the dead, could not have asked a shrewder question than poor Frank thus put, in his loyal desire

to justify his father's memory to his own loving heart. The Vicar glanced at him keenly, and sipped his wine.

"No, he did not," he answered, "and I wonder at it. I was with him often through his last illness: he had been ailing ever since the visit he paid you at Cambridge. We talked about many things. I remember one day in particular when he seemed very troubled and distressed, but he said he could not tell me why just then. You see we didn't think there was anything serious, till he suddenly lost his speech, and that was close upon the end."

"I wish I had been sent for earlier!"

"You would have been, had any of us apprehended danger. It was unfortunate, as things turned out, that you should have remained at Cambridge for the long vacation."

"That was my father's doings, as I think you may readily guess, sir," returned Frank. "When he came to Cambridge the term was nearly at an end. He asked me when I should be ready to take my degree; I laughed, and said never, that I was not up to it. He was vexed at that, and said I had better stay and study during the vacation instead of going home to amuse myself."

"He never seemed well after that journey," repeated the Vicar, "though several weeks passed on. The will was made only ten days before his death, by a strange lawyer for whom your father sent. They were shut in together: and by-and-by your two upper servants, Budd and good Mrs. Simms, were called into the room to witness the will."

"Well, all has clearly been quite fair," observed Frank, quietly.

The old Vicar looked shrewdly at him, his head bent and his eyes peering through their bushy brows. "Quite fair," he assented, "in so far as that it was your father's own act and deed. I do not believe a living soul knew aught of the contents of the will until it was read aloud after the funeral—save the gentleman who made it. I witnessed a will that your father drew up five years ago," he added. "Had you any idea what were your expectations under that?"

"I never thought of such a thing," answered Frank, warmly. "I never thought of death and my father together."

The Vicar was silent. He had been consulted about that other will, and thought it was well to keep his knowledge to himself, since that had bequeathed the whole of the personal estate to the second son, except a gift of five thousand pounds to the widow, for whose further benefit the real estate had been charged with an annuity of a thousand a year. The present arrangement was a strange reversal of things. "He must have had some adequate motive for it," was Mr. Toynbee's sage reflection.

"Well, well," he resumed presently, "if we wondered over this will for years, Frank, we could not alter it. We must take it as it is, and make the best of it. And nothing ever turns out so bad as it looks at first. The question is, what are you to do now?"

Frank only gazed blankly into the fire; already lit in these damp evenings of early autumn.

"Have you thought about this at all, Frank? Have you any leaning towards any particular path in life?"

Frank shook his head. Yet he had, very decidedly. A vision of bright hunting mornings, of gorse-clad commons, of cheery, leisurely debates with agent or farm tenantry, floated before his eyes. But these things had vanished from his path like flowers in October.

"No, sir," he answered. "Perhaps you will advise me."

The Vicar pushed his chair back from the table. "It is hard to deal with you young fellows," he said. "You're all so highty-tighty that an old man like me doesn't know where to touch you without pricking himself."

"I don't think I am," said Frank humbly.

"Or else I should say that, considering your gentle birth, which of course makes it impossible that you should dabble in commerce, and that you are already too late for the Army or the Navy, and that the prospects of the Bar are very poor, even for those with marked forensic talent, and considering moreover that it may be a long time before you enter upon your property, why——I come to the conclusion that you cannot do better than think of—the Church."

"The Church!" echoed Frank, aghast.

"Yes, the Church," returned the Vicar, serenely. "The Ravens have the presentation to two other livings besides this. I feel sure this is a course which Mrs. Raven will approve."

He spoke the last words with a jerk. They cost him more than all the rest. The Vicar did not like Mrs. Raven—the natural instincts which God had given him were true.

"But I'm not fit for a clergyman," said the astounded Frank.

"You are a gentleman by birth and by nature," said the Vicar. "I trust—I do trust that there is nothing in your moral nature to render you averse to the blameless life which every clergyman ought to lead?"

Frank marked the changed, doubtful tone of the last few words, and his face flushed.

"I mean, I'm not a religious fellow," he stammered. "At least—I never thought about it. And I couldn't take *that* up just because I must take up something."

The Vicar stirred the fire impatiently.

"I shouldn't know what to say to people in trouble, or dying, or anything of that sort," ran on Frank, forlornly. "And there'd be the preaching, sir!"

"I know you're fond of outdoor sports and they've been thrown in your way," pursued the Vicar, pausing with his back to the fire, "but I don't believe a man makes any the better parson (I like that old Saxon word) for always sitting with his feet on the fender, studying divinity. But I don't want to press you," he added, kindly under

standing Frank's silence. "It is but my plain duty to suggest anything for your welfare. That I should do as an old friend, even if I were not your trustee."

"I'll go home and think about it," Frank said at last, "because it is kind of you to have thought of it for me. It is very good of you to deem me fit for this. But I must know myself best after all. And it will not do. I feel quite sure it will not do."

The two shook hands, and the Vicar, in his own overflowing affability, followed the youth to the hall door, and shook hands again there.

The pain in Frank's heart was keen. He did not understand that, in all his changed world, himself had changed the most. If the dead Squire could have returned to life and welcomed his son to Ravenscourt that night, the two could not have met as they had parted. Frank's easy, unthinking life had passed away; he had mounted to a higher, though, as yet, a bleaker level.

He had left the Vicarage earlier than he usually did, because it was quite impossible to resume an ordinary chat, after that close, personal talk. It was a clear, calm, bright night, and he turned away from the Court instead of to it, and struck into one of the bosky lanes, which intersected a richly wooded tract of country extending behind the village, and between the Court park and the common, intending to return to Ravenscourt by a circuitous route.

All the Vicar's genuine kindliness could not disguise that he suspected the Squire must have had some very definite reason for his peculiar will. And if Mr. Toynbee, so old and familiar a friend, could thus reason, Frank felt what he had to expect from the rest of the world. And he knew that he did not deserve it!

He wandered on in the rich moonlight. The lanes were narrow, and their high banks cast such deep shadows that Frank did not see somebody coming towards him till the figure was almost passing by. Even then he saw but a small, slight girl, and had she passed on swiftly and kept in the shadow he could have seen no more.

But she slackened her pace, hesitated, and stood still: and in a low, tremulous voice timidly asked a question.

"Is this the road to the railway station?"

"It is not the road—yet it can lead you into it," said Frank. "But no more trains will be going out of the station to-night," he volunteered to add.

"I don't want the station," answered the weary voice, "only if I get into the road to the station I shall know my way."

The moon was behind the girl as she spoke, so that it left her face in shadow, while it fully illumined Frank's open countenance. Nevertheless, he could see enough to know that he was speaking to the young lady he had passed in the afternoon.

"It is not very easy to direct you," he said, "the lanes are so much alike. If you do not object, I can easily show you the way. It is awkward to be lost in such a spot as this, at this hour."

"Oh, thank you!" she said warmly. "But—why should I trouble you? I think I could follow your directions. I believe I only missed my way already because I was startled; and then I got confused."

"It is no trouble at all," replied Frank—and he turned to move off in the right direction. "I was only taking a little stroll. My home, Ravenscourt, lies in the road you want, and it is quite time I was there."

"It is very kind of you," she said, quietly, no longer resisting his offer. Perhaps she was only too thankful to accept it; or possibly she feared he might misunderstand any further deprecation. Frank had mentioned his own address quite simply as a mere matter of fact, but the girl had accepted it as an assurance of the good faith of his guidance and protection. She was wondering if this could be the second son, of whose disinheritance and sorrow she had heard only that morning. If so, how strange it was that they two should meet thus! She knew what her own sad errand had been, and what her own sad thoughts were—and she could guess at his.

A few minutes ago she had been crying bitterly enough in those shadowy, solitary lanes; but, woman-like, she now felt strangely comforted in pitying him. As for Frank, he thought she must surely be strangely lonely and friendless to be allowed to go wandering about in this way, when even the young maid-servants at the Court were never permitted to be outside the precincts after dark. And somehow the thought of other lonely people often takes the edge from our own loneliness.

"No wonder you were nervous," he said, alluding to her remark about having been startled, "abroad here alone. I think you must be very brave to have attempted such a night walk, especially in a strange place."

"I had come this way by daylight," she answered, "and I took note of the way-marks, for I knew I should have to return some time, though it might have been earlier this evening—or might not have been till to-morrow morning."

Her voice was sweet and sad. Her face, pale and gentle, won Frank's heart.

"You are surely quite a stranger here!" he observed. "I know most of the people at Ravenstoke."

"I was never here before to-day," she replied. "I came from London this morning, and I shall leave to-morrow for the north. It seems a very beautiful country," she added, as if rousing herself to go through the civilities due to her kind guide.

"It is a glorious country," said Frank. "But I shall be leaving it soon, too." He could not tell what made him say that to a stranger. Was it because the thought itself was so oppressive to him?

"This then must truly be the younger son," thought Alice Cleare.

"Well," she said, very gently, and in a tone tender with checked tears, "everything either leaves us or is left by us, sooner or later. Only God is everywhere; always everywhere."

"Ah, we all know that!" said Frank, a little hardly. "And it is easy enough to say it. But I am not sure that we realize it or feel it much when we are miserable."

"We could not be miserable if we did," said his companion, softly.

And Frank remembered the tears he had seen on her face that afternoon. And yet certainly it had not been a miserable face.

"I was very miserable the other day," she said, "for I got into an envious, evil temper. But I'm not miserable to-night, though I have just looked my last on my only brother's face!" and here the tears broke out again uncontrollably, the next minute interrupting herself with a half-uttered apology.

Frank was deeply touched. A few weeks ago he might have felt awkward and almost annoyed, but the sorrow he had borne himself had taught him to bear the sight of sorrow.

"We two were the last of us," she sobbed. "He was one of the masters at Gerston, a village some four miles away. I daresay you know it."

Frank nodded. He knew there was a large classical school there.

"I only heard yesterday that his illness was serious, I did not know that it was quite hopeless till I got a letter that was waiting for me at Ravenstoke this morning. But what a blessing, I got to see him once more—before he died! It might so easily have happened otherwise!"

"And are you going away so soon?" asked Frank. "But—— you will be coming back again?"

"No," she said, checking her emotion by a strong effort, and speaking again with comparative calmness. "I had just obtained a very good appointment as governess in a house in one of the northern counties, and they want me immediately, as there has been illness in the family, and the mother wishes to leave home for two or three weeks, and to put me in charge first. If my brother had lingered, I must have sent them word I could not come; but, now he is gone, I dare not lose so good a chance of a home and of work."

"Surely you ought to allow yourself a brief rest and quiet after such a blow!" said Frank, shocked at the stern necessities of life thus crowding behind the sad realities of death.

Alice Cleare shook her head. "I should have liked to stay for the funeral," she said, sadly; "but it would not be my duty—even to my dear brother himself. There will be expenses, you see. And William won't have a neglected funeral; the head master and his son will see after everything. They were very fond of him. They wanted me to stay at the school to-night," she added, "but as it was all over, I felt I must not miss to-morrow morning's train."

"And can you really bear it?" cried Frank.

"I must," she said, quietly: "and what one has to bear, one can. We grow stronger the more we bear."

Somehow Frank began to think that his life had been very contemptible. When he was rich again—if ever he was rich—he would remember how many people, not only of what are called "the poor," need help. And yet he felt that no millionnaire could help this girl at this moment: she was beyond and above all help, save the kind word and helpful service which all might render.

Alice Cleare's mood was changing. She blamed herself for having spoken of her own troubles, and for giving way to her feelings before a stranger.

"You must be very fond of this beautiful country," she said, after a pause of silence. "And I suppose, as you say, you really are acquainted with everybody. Do you know any queer person, eccentric or maybe a little mad, who is likely to take a late walk in these lanes?"

"No," said Frank, promptly, "I don't know of any queer person about Ravenstoke. There used to be one or two idiots in the place, but my people helped their friends to put them into asylums. What makes you ask?"

"I told you that I thought I had lost my way through being frightened," she answered, "and it was the appearance of a person I saw which frightened me. I was very foolish. It could not have had any thought of me at all, but it looked so odd and unnatural."

"Was it a man or a woman?" asked Frank.

"I don't know," she replied, with almost a little laugh, "and that's why I say 'It.' I think it was through my not being able to make it out at all that I was so silly. I am not readily frightened, but a sharp, sudden fear seized me as I looked at it."

"What did it look like?"

"It was a very tall person in a sort of long cloak, with what appeared to be a hood over the head. The cloak reached to the ankles, and there were just two feet to be seen—neither skirt nor trousers."

"Could you see the face?"

"The hood quite overshadowed it, but I could see the eyes in the moonlight—and they struck me as evil; probably because I was so scared. When one is frightened everything looks bad. As it turned its head, one side of the throat was exposed, and there seemed to be a red mark on it—but I could not make that out."

"I cannot think who this can have been," mused Frank. "It does not sound like any Ravenstoke character: unless it was somebody masquerading. But why that should be in a place like this I know not. Where did you see this?—was it long before you met me?"

"Not very," she replied; "though it seemed long, because I got bewildered. Then in my haste I lost my way, and I feared to retrace my steps, lest I should meet it again."

"I do wish you could describe to me whereabouts this was," said

Frank. "Our servants are fond of whispering about 'a ghost'—which, of course, is utter nonsense."

"I only know I had passed a style a few seconds before I met it," she observed: "and the lane where I found myself when I recovered from my trepidation, had an old, empty shed in it, with the door broken from its hinges, and lying in the ditch beside it. I remember that," she added, "because I was so frightened to pass that open door."

Frank mused. "The red mark on the neck!" he muttered. "Is anybody ——"

"Did you speak to me?" she asked when he came to the abrupt pause.

"No. I was wondering whether anybody can be doing this to frighten the Court servants," he added as they turned into the highroad.

"Do not let me give you any more trouble," she said, pausing in front of the lodge gates. "I know I am quite near the White Hart now. Thank you, very, very much."

"I shall certainly see you to the corner of the road," said Frank, stubbornly. He would not go farther than that. There was no need to provoke the curiosity of the gossiping landlord and landlady.

So at the bend of the road they parted. Frank raised his hat, and made as for an instant retreat, but turned again, and stood watching until the girl was safe within the doors of the White Hart.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A FAMILY JAR.

YOUTH is a mysterious time. Never could Ravenscourt have looked more lovely than it looked in the moonlight, as Frank returned up the avenue; and yet, for the moment, Frank forgot to think of the sorrow of leaving it. The world outside it had spells, after all.

He found his mother in the drawing-room, seated in a strange, half-rigid posture, which almost startled him. She turned upon him a white, fixed face, whose sight and hearing alike seemed strained towards something beyond ken.

"Is anything wrong, mother?" he asked, alarmed.

"No; oh, no," she answered, testily rousing herself.

"Where is Leonard? I am sorry if you have been alone."

"I must grow accustomed to be alone!" she said severely "Leonard is engaged on business in the library."

"Indeed! Who is with him?"

"A solicitor—a stranger," she replied briefly. Frank had his back towards her as he put the question, and she threw a quick side-glance at him, and let her handkerchief fall over a card which lay on a tiny what-not beside her.

"A solicitor—a stranger!" repeated Frank. "Why, surely we are not going to discard old Brackenbury?"

Frank was quite innocent in his astonished inquiry, but his mother took him up tartly.

"I think you may trust your brother to manage his own affairs. He is rather more discreet and cautious than you are."

Frank felt himself rebuked and relapsed into silence. He wondered whether it was the solicitor who had made his father's last will, but did not presume to inquire. It was not—as he found later—but an entire stranger. For the first time in his life, it struck him that the drawing-room was a disheartening and dismal chamber. The furniture was antique, and really very handsome, but Mrs. Raven kept it covered up with some pale striped stuff, not unlike washed-out bed-ticking. There were no fewer than five huge mirrors in the room, and his mother was reflected in three of them, while the melancholy chairs were triplicated in a most perplexing way. Frank felt an intense relief when, after some talking in the hall, the sound of wheels in the avenue was heard, and Leonard himself presently appeared in the drawing-room

Mrs. Raven rose and went to meet him. It struck Frank that she, too, was puzzled and anxious about this strange solicitor.

"You must be quite tired, Leonard," she said. "How long he has stayed! He cannot leave for London to-night."

"No," said Leonard, "he does not wish to. He has the White Hart fly, and means to drive to Standchester."

Leonard took up a position in the middle of the hearthrug. He was tall and thin, fair, light-eyed, with nothing vivid about him except his hair. That was red—the true Raven shade. The late Squire had it. One saw it again and again in the Raven family portraits. Probably the family were justified in their mysterious whisper that William the Red had been their greatest friend and their frequent guest in that earlier mansion which had been called Raven Keep, whose last fragment lingered in a shapeless wall in the kitchen garden.

The present Mrs. Raven had made the dismal discovery that the only four Ravens known to have escaped every shade of carroty had come to sorrowful ends; the last being that Gilbert Raven slain at Naseby, and whose betrothed cousin, Dorothy, had mourned away her days in crazed faithfulness.

"It is unlucky for a Raven not to be red," the lady would say, with a glance at Frank's brown curls.

Frank had comforted himself with the reflection that some of the very reddest Ravens had met with mishaps at least as great as those of the luckless quartette; yet the omen, dinned ever into his ears, had had a depressing influence on him.

During his sickly youth Leonard had contracted every habit of a selfish valetudinarian. And he had retained a fretful look and a

petulant manner which made his mean, selfish grasping seem like peevish self-defence.

"So you've been to the Vicar's, have you?" he remarked to Frank, as if the visit were some detected conspiracy. "I suppose he has been talking to you about your affairs."

Frank admitted that.

"I hope he will advise you to some direct course of action," said Leonard. "You have lost too much time already. I cannot think how my father could have allowed it!"

It might be truth, but it was galling. Leonard had never thrown out a hint to this effect before. Frank bit his lip, and took up a book. Presently Mrs. Raven spoke again.

"What have you been doing all day, Leonard? You have not said. Is anything going forward? Tell me your news."

"I have been speaking to old Peters, for one thing," said Leonard. "I told him I thought it was only due to so old a servant to let him know beforehand that he must not feel astonished if he gets a month's notice; so that he need not be taken unawares."

"Old Peters! a month's notice!" cried Frank, astounded. "Why, my father always meant to keep Peters on all his life! He used to say, if you remember, Leonard, that old servants should never be turned away; they did good work to the last, if let alone."

"Your father had ancient notions," put in Mrs. Raven, wailingly. "They did very well in the old times, but all is changed now-a-days, and we must change, too."

"But Frank has the genuine spirit of the fine old feudal lord," spoke Leonard, sneeringly. He was evidently in a very bad temper to-night. "It is a pity for the retainers that the generous inclination does not keep a banking account of its own."

Frank's blood rose. He and Leonard had, naturally enough, had very many slight tiffs before. But never yet had they stood in those relationships which give a deadly point to cruel words. It is not the size of the prick, but the amount of poison conveyed, which gives pain to a wound.

"It will be time enough for you to say that, when I attempt to draw on yours, Leonard," he retorted, hotly.

Perhaps Leonard had not intended his remark for anything beyond the sneer which came from his ill-conditioned state of feeling. But the sight of the passion he had evoked had the effect it usually produces on ungenerous minds—a temptation to strike a surer and sharper blow.

"Fortunately you have nothing to do with my banking account," Leonard said, coolly. "And since you know all your dear old retainers will depend on your mother's charity purse, dependent, in its turn, on her banker's balance, you may exercise your fine feudal spirit by declining to draw on it, too."

"I will starve rather than touch any of it," said Frank, springing up with energy.

"You need not fly into a fury," quietly observed Leonard. "You can say it and mean it without stamping on the carpet."

"Try to control your temper, Frank," commanded Mrs. Raven.

Frank's reckless declaration might have been but a form of angry words, which, if passed by, he would have forgotten. It was true, in a far higher sense than Leonard's scoff had conveyed, that Frank did indeed possess the old feudal spirit. Frank had his family pride, not of the ruined Keep or the Rufus hair, but of that ancestor, Gilbert Raven, slain at Naseby, who had sworn to his own hurt, and had not changed, though his oath had cost him the happy nuptial love of his cousin Dorothy, and had let his fair manor of Hatherley pass to his direst foe, so that the Ravens had been the poorer ever since. Very often and very proudly had Frank spoken of this ancestor during his boyish school-days.

That memory flashed across him now, and he vowed within himself that he would not fall beneath his old ideal. It seemed to him that he had no longer any absolute right to the chair he was using, or to the biscuits and sherry which a servant was even now bringing in on a supper-tray. He felt as if the spacious drawing-room were closing about him like the torture-chambers of ancient story. He gazed at the brother sitting opposite him, coolly surveying his own filbert nails. He gazed at his mother, who had resumed her book. They both presented that ostentation of indifference and serenity which is the sorest and most malicious of all aggravations. It betrayed Frank into the last agony of passion—a simulation of calmness—something like a lion trying to roar gently.

"I think it will be happier for you if I go from here," he said. "And I think, for my own comfort, that the sooner I go the better."

"Do not heed him, Leonard," coolly observed Mrs. Raven, as if ignoring Frank altogether. "Do not be drawn into any dispute. It takes two to make a quarrel. Let him be. He will be wiser in the morning."

"Mother!—but you are my mother. Never mind!" It was thus that poor Frank incoherently recalled himself to filial respect. "I will take your advice," he added passionately. "I need not talk when my actions will speak." And so saying, he left his seat, and strode away to his room.

Mrs. Raven and Leonard sat in silence. They did not even look at each other. Each had thoughts which the other guessed, but which neither cared to utter. At last Mrs. Raven spoke, softly.

"Do you think you enlisted Mr. Dewe's interest, Leonard?"

"He's quite ready to take the matter up," was the reply, given curtly.

"What did he think of my idea of the advertisement?"

"He approved it," said Leonard. "Probably he thought that it could do no harm. He took it with him to Standchester to-night. It will be in the paper to-morrow."

"Leonard, I see by your tone that you disbelieve me still!"

"I cannot help it, mother. I think, as I have said to you all along, that this wild fancy of yours can be nothing but the result of a fever-dream that came to you in your sickness."

Little sleep had Frank Raven that night. The moon came out behind the old trees outside his bed-room window and cast their shadows on his white window curtains, and he lay and watched the waving boughs as they swayed to and fro, like hands that warned or beckoned. Wild plans were surging through his brain.

His sole possession in the world was a hundred pounds, lying in his name in the bank at Cambridge. And, for a young man of his breeding and degree, that was infinitely less than the half-crown with which Hodge, the ploughboy, starts to seek his fortune. One thing only he decided on. He must leave Ravenstoke as soon as possible. He must go to London. There, much would be possible and endurable which would be impossible and unbearable here.

Next morning at the table a letter lay beside his plate, and a light flashed over his face when he saw its superscription and postmark.

It was from his cousin, Philip Connell—the eldest son of the late Squire's only sister Millicent, who had not married according to the Raven views, since her choice had fallen on a Dissenting minister, the son of a Manchester manufacturer, not very rich, and on the Radical side in politics. The Ravens and the Connells had seen nothing of each other for years; but since young Philip Connell had "eaten his dinners" in Lincoln's Inn, he had spent some few days of a shooting season at Ravenscourt. He and Frank had struck up a careless, good-humoured intimacy, in which the balance of patronage was decidedly on the side of the fluent and assured young barrister.

"Dear Frank,—I am back in London now. Will you not be the better for a little change? What do you say to coming here, and spending a few weeks with me. Town is getting empty, so we could be very quiet and yet cheerful enough. Do come at once, without any delay or ceremony, and take what you find of bachelor's luck.—Always, faithfully, your cousin,

"Philip Connell."

It is odd how often circumstances conspire to carry through half-formed plans. Frank was cooler this morning. But this invitation kept his resolution up to the mark, and yet saved any re-opening of the previous evening's acrimony.

Mrs. Raven offered no opposition to the plan. And the preparations for Frank's journey were briefly made. Charity Hale, old now, yet active and bitter of speech, came from the servant's hall to aid him. She held a position in the Raven nursery during the orphaned infancy of the late Squire, and she had lingered on in the household, performing those miscellaneous duties which are apt to slip between the fingers of the modern servant, and not altogether

looked upon by either masters or domestics as a menial. Her preference for the younger son, Frank, had been always openly declared. She had been heard to call Leonard "a poor mess of a man," nor did she always speak very respectfully of Mrs. Raven.

"I never thought to see the Squire out," she remarked to Frank, as she smoothed down the coats he lifted from his wardrobe, "and I never thought to see the day when you would be going away from Ravenscourt—and not even wanting to stay, either!"

"Going away!" echoed Frank, with a leap of his heart. "Haven't I often gone away before."

Charity Hale shook her head, and smiled grimly. "The old faces go, and the new ones come," she said, "and there's many queer up-turns in this world. I should not wonder now if the mistress were to take some young lady to live here as her companion."

Frank wondered what the old woman was driving at. He did not resent her familiarity. Nothing strikes us as familiar in those on whose foot we have "ridden to Banbury Cross," who have washed our faces and combed our hair. Frank had no especial love for Charity Hale, but she was an accustomed figure in his life. He might not have chosen her among old women, just as he might not have selected the old clock in the hall, had his choice been taken. But there was the clock and here was the woman.

"You always were reasonable, Mr. Frank," she went on. "You've not been the mistress's favourite at home, but don't let that downhearten you. The Raven red hair goes for nothing outside Ravenstoke, sir. Here's the county paper for to-day, too," she added, peering into his face. "Your mamma was very particular in asking for it this morning, so I expect there's something special in it."

"Thank you," said Frank.

"She seemed to find something interesting among the advertisements, for she pointed to one with her finger and passed it to Mr. Leonard," ran on Charity. "I daresay you'll make out what it was; it may interest you too."

"Put it over the clothes in the portmanteau," said Frank, to humour the old woman. "It will keep out the dust, and make me think of you, Charity, when I open the box in London this evening."

"Ah, I don't think much of London," observed Charity. "Except that it's bigger, I reckon it's much the same as Ravenstoke, and I know what that is. Places are like fleas: the worse looking when they're magnified."

By half-past eleven Frank was on his way to the station. And as he passed the White Hart it was not unnatural that he should remember how that stranger girl, with a heart sad as his own, but a strength far greater, had already started off in an opposite direction to that in which he was about to journey.

*(To be continued.)*

## A MYSTERY.

"LOOK here, Johnny Ludlow," said Darbyshire to me—Darbyshire being, as you may chance to remember, our doctor at Timberdale—"you seem good at telling of unaccountable disappearances: why don't you tell of that disappearance which took place here?"

I had chanced to look in upon him one evening when he was taking rest in his chimney corner, in the old red-cushioned chair, after his day's work was over, smoking his churchwarden pipe in his slippers and reading the story of "Dorothy Grape."

"We should like to see that disappearance on paper," went on Darbyshire. "It is the most curious thing that has happened in my experience."

True enough it was. Too curious for any sort of daylight to be seen through it; as you will acknowledge when you hear its details; and far more complicated than the other story.

The lawyer at Timberdale, John Delorane, was a warm-hearted and warm-tempered man of Irish extraction. He had an extensive practice, and lived in an old-fashioned, handsome red-brick house in the heart of Timberdale, with his only daughter and his sister, Hester.

You may have seen prettier girls than Ellin Delorane, but never one that the heart so quickly went out to. She was too much like her dead mother; had the same look of fragile delicacy, the same sweet face with its pensive sadness, the soft brown eyes and the lovely complexion. Mrs. Delorane had died of decline: people would say to one another, in confidence, they hoped Ellin might escape it.

The largest and best farm in the neighbourhood of Timberdale, larger than even that of the Ashtons, was called the Dower Farm. It belonged to Sir Robert Tenby, and had been occupied for many years by one Roger Brook, a genial, pleasant gentleman of large private means apart from his success in farming. Rich though he was, he did not disdain to see practically after his work himself; was up with the lark and out with his men, as a good farmer ought to be. Out of doors he was the keen, active, thorough farmer; indoors he lived as a gentleman. He had four children: three boys and one girl, who were all well and comprehensively educated.

But he intended his sons to work as he had worked: no idleness for him; no leading of indolent and self-indulgent lives. "Choose what calling you please," he said to them; "but stick to it when chosen, and do your very best in it." The eldest son, Charles, had no fancy for farming, no particular head for any of the learned professions; he preferred commerce. An uncle, Matthew Brook, was the head of a mercantile house in New York; he offered a post in it to Charles, who went out to him. The second son, Reginald, chose

the medical profession ; after qualifying for it, he became assistant to a doctor in London to gain experience. William, the third son, went to Oxford. He thought of the Church, but being conscientious, would not decide upon it hastily.

"So that not one of you will be with me," remarked Mr. Brook. "Well, be it so. I only want you to lead good and useful lives, striving to do your duty to God and to man."

But one of those overwhelming misfortunes, that I'm sure may be compared with the crashing of an avalanche, fell on Mr. Brook. In an evil hour he had become a shareholder in a stupendous undertaking which had banking for its staple basis ; and the thing failed. People talked of "swindling." Its managers ran away ; its books and money were nowhere ; its shareholders were ruined. Some of the shareholders ran away too ; Roger Brook, upright and honourable, remained to face the ruin. And utter ruin it was, for the company was one of unlimited liability.

The shock was too much for him : he died under it. Every shilling he possessed was gone ; harpies (it is what Timberdale called them) came down upon his furniture and effects, and swept them away. In less time almost than it takes to tell of, not a vestige remained of what had been, save in memory : Sir Robert Tenby had another tenant at the Dower Farm, and Mrs. Brook had moved into a little cottage-villa not a stone's throw from Darbyshire's. She had about two hundred a year of her own, which no adverse law could touch. Her daughter, Minnie, remained with her. You will hardly believe it, but they had named her by the romantic name of Araminta.

William Brook had come down from Oxford just before, his mind made up *not* to be a clergyman, but to stay on the farm with his father. When the misfortunes fell, he was, of course, thrown out ; and what to turn his hand to he did not at once know. Brought up to neither profession nor trade, no, nor to farming, it was just a dilemma. At present, he stayed with his mother.

One day he presented himself to Mr. Delorane. "Can you give me some copying to do, sir ?" he asked : "either at your office here, or at home. I write a good clear hand."

"What do you mean to do, Master William ?" returned the lawyer, passing over the question. The two families had always been intimate and much together.

"I don't know what ; I am waiting to see," said William. He was a slender young fellow of middle height, with gentle manners, a very nice, refined face, and a pair of honest, cheery, dark-blue eyes.

"Waiting for something to turn up, like our old friend Micawber !" said the lawyer.

"If I could earn only a pound a week while I am looking out, I should not feel myself so much of a burden on my mother—though she will not hear me say a word about that," the young man went

on. "You would not take me on as clerk and give me that sum, would you, Mr. Delorane?"

Well, they talked further; and the upshot was, that Mr. Delorane did take him on. William Brook went into the office as a clerk, and was paid a pound a week.

The parish wondered a little, making sundry comments over its tea-tables: for the good old custom of going out to real tea was not out of fashion yet in Timberdale. Everybody agreed that William Brook was to be commended for putting his shoulder to the wheel, but that it was a grave descent for one brought up to his expectations. Mr. St. George objected to it on another score.

Years before, there had arrived in England from the West Indies a little gentleman, named Alfred St. George. His father, a planter, had recently died, and the boy's relatives had sent him home to be educated, together with plenty of money for that purpose. Later, when of an age to leave school, he was articled to Mr. Delorane, and proved an apt, keen pupil. Next he went into the office of a renowned legal firm in London, became a qualified lawyer and conveyancer, and finally accepted an offer made him by Mr. Delorane, to return to Timberdale as his chief and managing clerk. Mr. Delorane paid him a handsome salary, and held out to him, as report ran, hopes of a future partnership.

Alfred St. George had grown up a fine man: tall, strong, lithe and active. People thought his face handsome, but it had unmistakably a touch of the tar-brush. The features were large and well formed, the lips full, and the purple-black hair might have been woolly but for being drilled into order with oils. His complexion was a pale olive, his black eyes were round, showing a great deal of the whites, and at times they wore a very peculiar expression. Take him for all in all, he was a handsome man, with a fluent tongue and persuasive eloquence.

It was Mr. St. George who spoke against William Brook's being taken on as clerk. Not that his objection applied to the young man himself, but to his probable capacity for work. "He will be of no use to us, sir," was the substance of his remonstrance to Mr. Delorane. "He has had no experience: and one can hardly snub Brook as one would a common clerk."

"Don't suppose he will be of much use," carelessly acquiesced Mr. Delorane, who was neither a stingy nor a covetous man. "What could I do but take him on when he asked me to? I like the young fellow; always did; and his poor father was my very good friend. You must make the best of him, St. George: daresay he won't stay long with us." At which St. George laughed good-naturedly and shrugged his shoulders.

But William Brook did prove to be of use. He got on so well, was so punctual, so attentive, so intelligent, that fault could not be found with him; and at the end of the first year Mr. Delorane voluntarily doubled his pay—raising it to two pounds per week.

Timberdale wondered again: and began to ask how it was that young Brook, highly educated, and reared to expect some position in the world, could content himself with stopping on, a lawyer's clerk? Did he mean to continue in the office for ever? Had he ceased to look out for that desirable something that was to turn up? Was he parting with all laudable ambition?

William Brook could have told them, had he dared, that it was not lack of ambition chaining him to his post, but stress of love. He and Ellin Delorane had entered a long while past into the mazes of that charming dream, than which, as Tom Moore tells us, there's nothing half so sweet in life, and the world was to them as the Garden of Eden.

It was close upon the end of the second year before Mr. Delorane found it out. He went into a storm of rage and reproaches—chiefly showered upon William Brook, partly upon Ellin, a little upon himself.

"I have been an old fool," he spluttered to his confidential clerk. "Because the young people had been intimate in the days when the Brooks were prosperous, I must needs let it go on still, and never suspect danger! Why, the fellow has had his tea here twice a week upon an average!—and brought Ellin home at night when she has been at his mother's!—and I—I—thought no more than if it had been her brother! I could thrash myself! And where have her Aunt Hester's eyes been, I should like to know!"

"Very dishonourable of Brook," assented St. George, knitting his brow. "Perhaps less harm is done than you fear, sir. They are both young, can hardly know their own minds; they will grow out of it. Shall you part them?"

"Do you suppose I shouldn't!" retorted the lawyer.

William Brook was discharged from the office: Ellin received orders to give up his acquaintanceship; she was not to think of him in private or speak to him in public. Thus a little time went on. Ellin's bright face began to fade; Aunt Hester looked sick and sorry; the lawyer had never felt so uncomfortable in his life.

Do what he would, he could not get out of his liking for William Brook, and Ellin was dear to him as the apple of his eye. He had been in love himself once, and knew what it meant; little as you would believe it of a stout old red-faced lawyer; knew that both must be miserable. So much the better for Brook—but what of Ellin?

"One would think it was you who had had your lover sent to the right-about!" he wrathfully began to Aunt Hester, one morning when he came upon her in tears as she sat at her sewing. "I'd hide my face if I were you, unless I could show a better."

"It is that I am so sorry for Ellin, John," replied Aunt Hester, meekly wiping her tears. "I—I am afraid that some people bear sorrow worse than others."

"Now what do you mean by that?"

"Oh, not much," sighed Aunt Hester, not daring to allude to the dread lying latent in her own mind—that Ellin might fade away like her mother. "I can see what a sharp blow it has been to the child, John, and so—and so I can but feel it myself."

"Sharp blow! Deuce take it all! What business had young Brook to get talking to her about such rubbish as love?"

"Yes indeed, it is very unfortunate," said Aunt Hester. "But I do not think he has talked to her, John; I imagine he is too honourable to have said a single word. They have just gone on loving one another in secret and in silence, content to live in the unspoken happiness that has flooded their two hearts."

"Unspoken fiddlestick? What a simpleton you are, Hester!"

Mr. Delorane turned off in a temper. He knew it must have been a "sharp blow" to Ellin, but he did not like to hear it so stated to his face. Banging the door behind him, he was crossing the hall to the office—which made a sort of wing to the house, when he met William Brook.

"Will you allow me to speak to you, sir?" asked the young man in a tone of deprecation. And, though the lawyer had the greatest mind in the world to tell him NO and send him head-foremost out again, he thought of Ellin, he thought of his dead friend, Roger Brook; so he gave a growl, and led the way into the dining-room.

In his modest winning way, William Brook spoke a little of the trouble that had come upon their family——how deeply sorry he was that Ellin and he should have learnt to care for one another for all time, as it was displeasing to Mr. Delorane ——"

"Hang it, man," interrupted the lawyer irascibly, too impatient to listen further—"what on earth do you propose to yourself? Suppose I did not look upon it with displeasure?—are you in a position to marry her?"

"You would not have objected to me had we been as we once were—prosperous, and ——"

"What the dickens has that to do with it?" roared the lawyer. "Our business lies with the present, not the past."

"I came here to tell you, sir, that I am to leave for New York to-night. My brother Charles has been writing to me about it for some time past. He says I cannot fail to get on well in my uncle's house, and attain to a good position. Uncle Matthew has no sons: he will do his best to advance his nephews. What I wish to ask you, sir, is this—if, when my means shall be good and my position assured, you will allow me to think of Ellin?"

"The man's mad!" broke forth Mr. Delorane, more put about than he had been at all. "Do you suppose I should let my only child go to live in a country over the seas?"

"No, sir, I have thought of that. Charles thinks, if I show an aptitude for business, they may make me their agent over here. Oh,

Mr. Delorane, be kind, be merciful: for Ellin's sake and for mine! Do not send me away without hope!"

"Don't you think you possess a ready-made stock of impudence, William Brook?"

The young man threw his earnest, dark-blue eyes into the lawyer's. "I feared you would deem so, sir. But I am pleading for what is dearer to me and to her than life: our lives will be of little value to us if we must spend them apart. Only just one ray of possible hope, Mr. Delorane! It is all I ask."

"Look here; we'll drop this," cried the lawyer, his hands in his pockets, rattling away violently at the silver in them, his habit when put out, but nevertheless calming down in temper, for in spite of prejudice he did like the young man greatly, and he was not easy as to Ellin. "The best thing you can do is to go where you are going—over the Atlantic: and we'll leave the future to take care of itself. The money you think to make may turn out all moonshine, you know. There; that's every word I'll say and every hope I'll give, though you stop all day bothering me, William Brook."

And perhaps it was as much as William Brook had expected: anyway, it did not absolutely forbid him hope. He held out his hand timidly.

"Will you not shake hands with me, sir—I start to-night—and wish me God speed."

"I'll wish you better sense; and—and I hope you'll get over safely," retorted Mr. Delorane: but he did not withhold his hand. "No correspondence with Ellin, you understand, young man; no underhand love-making."

"Yes, sir, I understand; and you may rely upon me."

He quitted the room as he spoke, to make his way out as he came—through the office. The lawyer stood in the passage and looked after him: and a thought, that had forced itself into his mind several times since this trouble set in, crossed it again. Should he make the best of a bad bargain: give Brook a chief place in his own office and let them set up in some pleasant little home near? Ellin had her mother's money: and she would have a great deal more at his own death; quite enough to allow her husband to live the idle life of a gentleman—and William was a gentleman, and the nicest young fellow he knew. Should he? For a full minute Mr. Delorane stood deliberating—yes, or no; then he took a hasty step forward to call the young man back. Then, wavering and uncertain, he stepped back again, and let the idea pass.

"Well, how have you sped?" asked Mr. St. George, as William Brook reappeared in the office. "Any hope?"

"Yes, I think so," answered William. "At least, it is not absolutely forbidden. There's a line in a poem my mother would repeat to us when we were boys—'God and an honest heart will bear us through the roughest day.' I trust He, and it, will so bear me and Ellin."

"Wish I had your chance, old fellow!"

"My chance!" repeated William.

"To go out to see the world; to go out to the countries where gold and diamonds are picked up for the stooping—instead of being chained, as I am, between four confined walls, condemned to spend my life over musty parchments."

William smiled. "I don't know where you can pick up gold and diamonds for the stooping. Not where I am going."

"No, not in New York. You should make your way to the Australian gold-fields, Brook, or to the rich Californian mines, or to the diamond mountains in Africa, and come back—as you would in no time—with a sack of money on your shoulders, large enough to satisfy even Delorane."

"Or lose my health, if not my life, in digging, and come home without a shirt to my back; a more common result than the other, I fancy," remarked William. "Well, good-bye, old friend."

St. George, towering aloft in his height and strength, put his arm around William's shoulder and walked thus with him to the street entrance. There they shook hands, and parted. Ellin Delorane, her face shaded behind the drawing-room curtain from the October sun, watched the parting.

There was to be no set farewell allowed to her. She understood that. But she gathered from Aunt Hester, during the day, that her father had not been altogether obdurate, and that if William could get on in the future, perhaps things might be suffered to come right. It brought to her a strange comfort. So very slight a ray, no bigger than one of the specks that fall from the sky, as children say, will serve to impart a most unreasonable amount of hope to the troubled heart.

Towards the close of the afternoon, Ellin went in her restlessness to pay a visit to her friend Grace at the Rectory, who had recently become Herbert Tanerton's wife, and sat talking with her till it was pretty late. The moon, rising over the tops of the trees, caused her to start up with an exclamation.

"What will Aunt Hester say!"

"If you don't mind going through the churchyard, Ellin," said Grace, "you would cut off that corner, and save a little time." So Ellin took that route.

"Ellin!"

"William!"

They had met face to face under the church walls. He explained that he was sparing a few minutes to say farewell to his friends at the Rectory. The moon, coming out from behind a swiftly passing cloud, for it was rather a rough night, shone down upon them and upon the graves around them. Wildly enough beat the heart of each.

"You saw papa to-day," she whispered unevenly, as though her breath were short.

"Yes, I saw him. I cannot say that he gave me hope, Ellin, but he

certainly did not wholly deny it. I think—I believe—that—if I can succeed in getting on, all may be well with us yet."

William Brook spoke with hesitation. He felt trammelled; he could not in honour say what he would have wished to say. This meeting might be unorthodox, but it was purely accidental; neither he nor Ellin had sought it.

"Good-bye, my darling," he said with emotion, clasping her hands in his. "As we have met, there cannot be much wrong in our saying it. I may not write to you, Ellin; I may not even ask you to think of me; I may not, I suppose, tell you in so many words that I shall think of you; but, believe this: I go out with one sole aim and end in view—that of striving to make a position sufficiently fair to satisfy your father."

The tears were coursing down her cheeks like rain; she could hardly speak for agitation. Their hearts were aching to pain.

"I will be true to you always, William," she whispered. "I will wait for you, though it be to the end of my life."

To be in love with a charming young lady, and to have her all to yourself in a solitary graveyard under the light of the moon, presents an irresistible temptation for taking a kiss, especially if the kiss is to be a farewell kiss for days and for years. William Brook did not resist it; very likely did not try to. In spite of Mr. Delorane and everybody else, he took his farewell kiss from Ellin's lips.

Then they parted with a sob of pain, he going one way, she the other. Only those of us—there are not many—who have gone through this parting agony can know how it wrings the aching heart.

But sundry superstitious gossips, hearing of this afterwards, assured Ellin that it must be unlucky to say farewell amid graves.

## II.

The time went on. William Brook wrote regularly to his people, and Minty whispered the news to Ellin Delorane. He would send kind remembrances to friends, love to those who cared for it. He did not dislike the work of a mercantile life, and thought he should do well—in time.

In time. There was the rub, you see. We say "in time" when we mean next Christmas, and we also say it when we mean next century. By the end of the first year William Brook was commanding a handsome salary; but the riches that might enable him to aspire to the hand of Miss Delorane loomed obscurely in the distance yet. Ellin seemed strong and well, gay and cheerful, went about Timberdale, and laughed and talked with the world, just as though she had never had a lover, or was not waiting for somebody over the water. Mr. Delorane thought she must have forgotten that scapegrace, and he hoped it was so.

It was about this time, the end of the first year, that a piece of good luck fell to Mr. St. George. He came into a fortune. Some relative in the West Indies died and left it to him. Timberdale put it down

at a thousand pounds a year, so I suppose it might be about five hundred. It was thought he might be for giving up his post at Mr. Delorane's to be a gentleman at large. But he did nothing of the kind. He quitted his lodgings over Salmon's shop, and went into a pretty house near Timberdale Court, with a groom and old Betty Huntsman as housekeeper, and set up a handsome gig and a grey horse. And that was all the change.

As the second year went on, Ellin Delorane began to droop a little. Aunt Hester did not like it. One of the kindest friends Ellin had was Alfred St. George. After the departure of young Brook, he had been so tender with Ellin, so considerate, so indulgent to her sorrow, and so regretful (like herself) of William's absence, that he had won her regard. "It will be all right when he comes back, Ellin," he would whisper: "only be patient."

But in this, the second year, Mr. St. George's tone changed. It may be that he saw no hope of any happy return, and deemed that, for her own sake, he ought to repress any hope left in her.

"There's no more chance of his returning with a fortune than there is of my going up to the moon," he said to Tod confidentially one day when we met him striding along near the ravine.

"Don't suppose there is—in this short time," responded Tod.

"I'm afraid Ellin sees it, too: she seems to be losing her spirits. Ah, Brook should have done as I advised him—gone a little farther and dug in the gold-fields. He might have come back a Crœsus then. As it is—whew! I'd not give a copper sixpence for his chance."

"Do you know what I heard say, St. George?—that you'd like to go in for the little lady yourself."

The white eye balls surrounding St. George's dark orbs took an extra tinge of yellow as they rolled on Tod. "Who said it?" he asked quietly.

"Darbyshire. He says you are in love with her as smartly as ever Brook was."

St. George laughed. "Old Darbyshire? Well, perhaps he is not far wrong. Anyway, love's free, I believe. Were I her father, Brook should prove his eligibility to propose for her, or else give her up. Good-day, Todhetley; good-day, Johnny."

St. George went off at a quick pace. Tod, looking after him, made his comments. "Should not wonder but he wins her. He is the better man of the two ——"

"The better man!" I interrupted.

"As to means, at any rate: and see what a fine upright free-limbed fellow he is! And where will you find one more agreeable?"

"In tongue, nowhere; I admit that. But I'd not give up William Brook for him, were I Ellin Delorane."

That St. George was in love with her grew as easy to be seen as is the round moon in harvest. Small blame to him. Who could be in the daily companionship of a sweet girl like Ellin Delorane, and

not learn to love her, I should like to know? Tod told St. George he wished he had his chance.

At last St. George spoke to her. It was in April, eighteen months after Brook's departure. Ellin was in the garden at sunset, busy with the budding flowers, when St. George came to join her, as he sometimes did, on leaving the office for the day. Aunt Hester sat sewing at the open glass doors of the window.

"I have been gardening till I am tired," was Ellin's greeting to him, as she sat down on a bench near the sweetbriar bush.

"You look pale," said Mr. St George. "You often do look pale now, Ellin: do you think you can be quite well?"

"Pray don't let Aunt Hester overhear you," returned Ellin in a covert, jesting tone. "She begins to have fancies, she says, that I am not as well as I ought to be, and threatens to call in Mr. Darbyshire."

"You need some one to take care of you; some one near and dear to you, who would study your every look and action, who would not suffer the winds of heaven to blow upon your face too roughly," went on St. George, plunging into Shakespeare. "Oh, Ellin, if you would suffer me to be that one ——"

Her face turned crimson; her lips parted with emotion; she rose up to interrupt him in a sort of terror.

"Pray do not continue, Mr. St. George. If—if I understand you arightly, that you—that you—— "

"That I would be your loving husband, Ellin; that I would shelter you from all ill until death us do part. Yes, it is nothing less than that."

"Then you must please never to speak of such a thing again; never to think of it. Oh, do not let me find that I have been mistaking you all this time," she added in uncontrollable agitation: "that while I have ever welcomed you as my friend—and his—you have been swayed by another motive!"

He did not like the agitation; he did not like the words; and he bit his lips, striving for calmness.

"This is very hard, Ellin."

"Let us understand each other once for all," she said— "and oh, I am so sorry that there's need to say it. What you have hinted at is impossible. Impossible: please not to mistake me. You have been my very kind friend, and I value you; and, if you will, we can go on still on the same pleasant terms, caring for one another in friendship. There can be nothing more."

"Tell me one thing," he said: "we had better, as you intimate, understand each other fully. Can it be that your hopes are still fixed upon William Brook?"

"Yes," she answered in a low tone, as she turned her face away. "I hope he will come home yet, and that—that matters may be smoothed for us with papa. While that hope remains it is simply

treason to talk to me as you would have done," she concluded with a spurt of anger.

"Ellin," called out Aunt Hester, putting her head out beyond the glass doors, "the sun has set; you had better come in."

"One moment, Ellin," cried Mr. St. George, preventing her: "will you forgive me?"

"Forgive and forget, too," smiled Ellin, her brow smoothing itself. "But you must never recur to the subject again."

So Mr. St. George went home, his accounts settled—as Tod would have said: and the days glided on.

"What is it that ails Ellin?"

It was a piping-hot morning in July, in one of the good old hot summers that we seem never to get now; and Aunt Hester sat in her parlour, its glass doors open, adding up the last week's bills of the butcher and the baker, when she was interrupted by this question from her brother. He had come stalking upon her, rattling as usual, though quite unconsciously, the silver in his trowsers pockets. The trowsers were of nankeen: elderly gentlemen wore them in those days for coolness.

"What ails her!" repeated Aunt Hester, dropping the bills in alarm. "Why do you ask me, John?"

"Now, don't you think you should have been a Quaker?" retorted Mr. Delorane. "I put a simple question to you, and you reply to it by asking me another. Please to answer mine first. What is it that is the matter with Ellin?"

Aunt Hester sighed. Of too timid a nature to put forth her own opinion upon any subject gratuitously in her brother's house, she hardly liked to give it even when asked for. For the past few weeks Ellin had been almost palpably fading away; was silent and dispirited, losing her bright colour, getting thinner; might be heard catching up her breath in one of those sobbing sighs that betoken all too surely some secret, ever-present, inward sorrow. Aunt Hester had observed this: she now supposed it had at length penetrated to the observation of her brother.

"Can't you speak?" he demanded.

"I don't know what to say, John. Ellin does not seem well, and looks languid: of course this broiling weather is against us all. But ——"

"But what?" cried the lawyer, as she paused. "As to broiling weather, that's nothing new in July."

"Well, John—only you take me up so—and I'm sure I'd not like to anger you. I was about to add that I think it is not so much illness of body with Ellin as illness of mind. If one's mind is ransacked with perpetual worry ——"

"Racked with perpetual worry," interrupted Mr. Delorane, unconsciously correcting her mistake. "What has she got to worry her?"

"Dear me! I suppose it is about William Brook. He has been gone

nearly two years, John, and seems to be no nearer coming home with a fortune than he was when he left. I take it that this troubles the child: that she is losing hope."

Mr. Delorane, standing before the open window, his back to his sister, turned the silver coins about in his two pockets more vehemently than before. "You say she is not ailing in body?"

"Not yet. She is never very strong, you know."

"Then there's no cause to be uneasy."

"Well, John—not yet, perhaps. But should this state of despair, if I don't use too strong a word, continue, it will tell in time upon her health, and might bring on—bring on ——"

"Bring on what?" sharply asked the lawyer.

"I was thinking of her mother," said poor Aunt Hester, with as much deprecation as though he had been the Great Mogul: "but I trust, John, you'll not be too angry with me for saying it."

Mr. Delorane did not say whether he was angry or not. He stood there, fingering his sixpences and shillings, gazing apparently at the grass-plat, in reality seeing nothing. He was recalling a past vision: that of his delicate wife, dying of consumption before her time; he seemed to see a future vision: that of his daughter, dying as she had died.

"When it comes to dreams," timidly went on Aunt Hester, "I can't say I like it. Not that I am one to put faith in the foolish signs old wives talk of—that if you dream of seeing a snake, you've got an enemy; or, if you seem to be in the midst of a lot of beautiful white flowers, it's a token of somebody's death. I am not so silly as that, John. But for some time past Ellin has dreamt perpetually of one theme—that of being in trouble about William Brook. Night after night she seems to be searching for him: he is lost, and she cannot tell how or where."

Had Aunt Hester suddenly begun to hold forth in the unknown tongue, it could not have brought greater surprise to Mr. Delorane. He turned short round to stare at her.

"Seeing what a wan and weary face the child has come down with of late, I taxed her with not sleeping well," continued Aunt Hester, "and she confessed to me that she was feeling a good bit troubled by her dreams. She generally has them towards morning, and the theme is always the same. The dreams vary, but the subject is alike in all—that William Brook is lost, and that she is searching for him."

"Stuff! Nonsense! Rubbish!" put in Mr. Delorane.

"Well, John, I daresay it is nonsense," conceded Aunt Hester meekly: "but I confess I don't like dreams that come to you persistently night after night and always upon one and the same subject. Why should they come?—that's what I ask myself. Be sure, though, I make light of the matter to Ellin, and tell her her digestion is out of order. Over and over again, she says, they seem to have the clue to

his hiding place, but they never succeed in finding him. And—and I am afraid, John, that the child, through this, has taken up the notion that she shall never see him again."

Mr. Delorane, making some impatient remark about the absurdity of women in general, turned round and stood looking into the garden as before. Ellin's mind was getting unhinged with the long separation, she had begun to regard it as hopeless, and hence these dreams that Brook was "lost," he told himself, and with reason: and what was he to do?

How long he stood thus in perfect silence, no sound to be heard but the everlasting jingling of the loose silver, Aunt Hester did not know; pretty near an hour she thought. She wished he would go; she felt very uncomfortable, as she always did feel when she vexed him—and here were the bills waiting to be added up. At length he turned sharply, with the air of one who has come to some decision, and returned to the office.

"I suppose I shall have to do it myself," he remarked to Mr. St. George.

"Do what, sir!"

"Send for that young fellow back, and let them set up in some little homestead near me. I mean Brook."

"Brook!" stammered St. George.

"Here's Ellin beginning to fade and wither. It's all very well for her aunt to talk about the heat! *I* know. She is pining after him, and I can't see her do it; so he must come home."

Of all the queer shades that can be displayed by the human countenance, about the queerest appeared in that of Mr. St. George. It was not purple, it was not green, it was not yellow; it was a mixture of the three. He gazed at his chief and master as one gazes at a madman.

"Brook can come into the office again," continued Mr. Delorane. "I don't like young men to be idle; leads 'em into temptation. We'll make him head clerk here, next to you, and give him a couple of hundred a year. If—what's the matter?"

For the strange look on his manager's face had caught the eye of Mr. Delorane. St. George drew three or four gasping breaths.

"Have you thought of Miss Delorane, sir—of her interests—in planning this?" he presently asked.

"Why that's what I do think of; nothing else. You may be sure I'd not think of it for the interests of Brook. All the same, I like the young man, and always shall. The child is moping herself into a bad way. Where shall I be if she should go into a decline like her mother? No, no; she shall marry and get proper interests around her."

"She could do that without being sacrificed to Brook," returned St. George in a low tone. "There are others, sir, of good and suitable position, who would be thankful to take her—whose pride it would be to cherish her and render every moment of her life happy."

"Oh, I know that; you are one of 'em," returned Mr. Delorane carelessly. "It's what all you young sparks are ready to say of a pretty girl, especially if she be rich as well. But don't you see, St. George, that Ellin does not care for any of you. Her heart is fixed upon Brook, and Brook it must be."

Of course this news came out to Timberdale. Some people blamed Mr. Delorane, others praised him. Delorane must be turning childish in his old age, said one; Delorane is doing a good and a wise thing, cried another. Opinions vary in this world, you know, and ever will, as proved to us in the fable of the old man and his ass.

But now—and it was a strange thing to happen—the very next day Mr. Delorane got a letter from William Brook, eight closely written pages. Briefly, this was its substance. The uncle, Matthew Brook of New York, was about to establish a house in London, in correspondence with his own there; he had offered the managership of it to William, with a small share of profits, guaranteeing that the latter should not be less than seven hundred a year.

"And if you can only be induced to think this enough for us to begin upon, dear sir, and will give me Ellin," wrote the young man, "I can but say that I will strive to prove my gratitude in loving care for her; and I trust you will not object to her living in London. I leave New York next month, to be in England in September, landing at Liverpool, and I shall make my way at once to Timberdale, hoping you will allow me to plead my cause in person."

"No, no, Master William, you'll not carry my daughter off to London," commented Mr. Delorane aloud, when he had read the letter—not but that it gratified him. "You must give up your post, young man, and settle down by me here, if you are to have Ellin. I don't see, St. George, why Brook should not make himself into a lawyer, legal and proper," added he thoughtfully. "He is young enough—and he does not dislike the work. You and he might be associated together after I am dead: 'Brook and St. George.'"

Mr. St. George's face turned crusty: he did not like to hear his name put at the back of Brook's. "I never feel too sure of my own future," he said in reply. "Now that I am at my ease in the world, tempting visions come often enough across me of travelling out to see it.'

Mr. Delorane wrote a short, pithy note in answer to the appeal of William Brook, telling him he might come and talk to him as soon as he returned. "The young fellow may have left New York before it can reach him," remarked the lawyer, as he put the letter in the post; "but if so, it does not much matter."

So there was Timberdale, all cock-a-hoop at the prospect of seeing William Brook again, and the wedding that was to follow. Sam Mullet, the clerk, was for setting the bells to ring beforehand.

III.

Some people think September the pleasantest month in the year, when the heats of summer have passed and the frosts of winter have not come. Never a finer September than we had that autumn at Timberdale; the skies looked bright, the leaves of the trees were putting on their tints of many colours, and the land was not yet quite shorn of its golden grain.

All the world was looking out for William Brook. He did not come. Disappointment is the lot of man. Of woman also. When the third week was dragging itself along in expectancy, a letter came to Mrs. Brook from William. It was to say that his return home was somewhat delayed, as he should have to take Jamaica en route, to transact some business at Kingston for his uncle. He should then proceed direct from Kingston by steamer to Liverpool, which place he hoped to reach before the middle of October. "Tell all my friends this, that they may not wonder at my delay," the letter concluded; but it contained no intimation that he had received the answer written by Mr. Delorane.

A short postscript was yet added, in these words: "Alfred St. George has, I know, some relatives living in, or near Kingston—planters, I believe. Tell him I shall call upon them, if I can make time, to see whether they have any commands for him."

Long before the middle of October, Ellin Delorane became obviously restless. A sort of uneasy impatience seemed to have taken possession of her: and without cause. One day, when we called at Mr. Delorane's to take a message from home, Ellin was in the garden with her out-door things on, waiting to go out with her aunt.

"What a ridiculous goose you are!" began Tod. "I hear you have taken up the notion that Sweet William has gone down in the Caribbean Sea."

"I'm sure I have not," said Ellin. "Aunt Hester must have told you that fable when she was at Crabb Cot yesterday."

"Just so. She and the Mater laid their gossiping caps together for the best part of an hour—and all about the foolishness of Miss Ellin Delorane."

"Why you know, Ellin," I put in, "it is hardly the middle of October yet."

"I tell myself that it is not," she answered gravely. "But, somehow, Johnny, I don't—don't—expect—him."

"Now, what on earth do you mean?"

"I wish I knew what. All I can tell you is, that when his mother got that letter from William last month, saying his return was delayed, a sort of ominous foreboding seized hold of me, an apprehension that he would never come. I try to shake it off, but I cannot. Each day, as the days come round, only serves to make it ronger."

"Don't you think a short visit to Droitwich would do you good, Ellin?" cried Tod, which was our Worcestershire fashion of recommending people to the lunatic asylum.

"Just listen to him, Johnny!" she exclaimed with a laugh.

"Yes, 'just listen to him'—and just listen to yourself, Miss Ellin, and see which talks the most sense," he retorted. "Have you got over those dreams yet?"

Ellin turned her face to him quickly. "Who told you anything about that?—Aunt Hester?"

Tod nodded. "It's true, you know."

"Yes, it is true," she slowly said. "I have had those strange dreams for some weeks now; I have them still."

"That William Brook is lost?"

"That he is lost, and that we are persistently searching for him. Sometimes we are seeking for him in Timberdale, sometimes at Worcester—in America, in France, in places that I have no knowledge of. There always seems to be a sadness connected with it—a sort of latent conviction that he will never be found."

"The dreams beget the dreams," said Tod, "and I should have thought you had better sense. They will soon vanish, once Sweet William makes his appearance: and mind, Miss Ellin, that you invite me to the wedding."

Ellin sighed—and smiled. And just then Aunt Hester appeared attired in her crimson silk shawl with the fancy border, and the primrose feather in her Leghorn bonnet.

A day or two went on, bringing no news of the traveller. On the nineteenth of October—I shall never forget the date—Mr. and Mrs. Todhetley and ourselves set off in the large open phaeton for a place called Pigeon Green, to spend the day with some friends living there. On this same morning, as it chanced, a very wintry one, Mr. St. George started for Worcester in his gig, accompanied by Ellin Delorane. But of this we knew nothing. He had business in the town; she was going to spend a few days with Mary West, formerly Mary Coney.

Ellin was well wrapped up, and Mr. St. George, ever solicitous for her comfort, kept the warm fur rug well about her during the journey: the skies looked grey and threatening, the wind was high and bitterly cold. Worcester reached, he drove straight through the town, left Ellin at Mrs. West's door, in the Foregate street, and then drove back to the Hare and Hounds Inn to put up his horse and gig.

And for the later events of this day, with the singular mystery that then set in, we must be content to wait until next month.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

## AN ÆSTHETIC.

She was a maiden of mournful mien,
Clad in a garment of sad, sage green,
With peacocks' feathers strangely bedight;
Skimp was the skirt, and the sleeves full tight.
No frivolous gems that maiden wore,
But a fan in her taper hand she bore,
And on it was painted—so simple and neat—
A sunflower, with all its petals complete.
Her face was weary and white and wan,
Her hair was the hue of the setting sun;
She did not smile, she did not talk,
She drooped like a lily upon its stalk,
And what were her musings none might guess—
Her thoughts were too "utter" for words to express!

M. E. P.

# THE SPIRIT ORGANIST OF SEVILLE.

## A Legend of Christmas Eve.

### I.

THE convent church of Santa Inèz, after the manner of those in Spain, was gorgeously illuminated. The floods of light that poured down from the altars from thousands of wax candles filled the whole church, and threw their glittering rays upon the rich jewels of the ladies, who, kneeling on velvet cushions, formed a brilliant circle round the altar rails. Behind them, arrayed in uniform or gala dress, stood the knights and first nobility of Seville, their breasts covered with decorations, stars, and medals, their hands holding plumed caps or resting upon the hilts of their swords, as though they wished to form a bulwark of defence for their wives and daughters against the multitudes behind.

This crowd, that surged like an unquiet sea at the end of the building, broke forth in a murmur of joy when they saw the Archbishop, who had come from his cathedral; and, after seating himself upon a crimson throne near the high altar, thrice blessed the people.

It was the hour when the mass should commence. A few moments however passed, and the celebrant priests did not appear. The nobles and knights exchanged a few words in a hushed tone, and the Archbishop sent a messenger to the sacristy to know the reason of the delay.

"Maese Perez has been taken ill in the night, very ill; it will be impossible for him to perform at the midnight mass," was the answer.

This news spread like wild-fire among the crowds, who had begun to be impatient, and it would be vain to describe the disappointment it caused. At that moment a gaunt-looking man, lean, bony, and sour-eyed as well, stepped forward, and addressed the Archbishop.

"Maese Periz is not here, and the ceremony cannot begin. If your Eminence wishes, I will play the organ in his absence. Maese Perez is not the first organist in the world, nor at his death will this organ grow silent for the want of players."

The Archbishop made a sign of assent. Some of the people who knew this stranger to be an envious organist, and an enemy of the other, began murmuring, when suddenly a great noise was heard in the porch.

"Maese Perez is come! Maese Perez is here!" rose above that uproar, and every eye turned towards the entrance of the church. The organist, pale and deathly, was being carried into the church in an arm-chair, which a number of hands were striving to lift upon their shoulders. The injunctions of the doctors, and the tears of his

daughter, had been unavailing to prevent him from rising from his bed.

"No," he had said, "I cannot die without visiting my organ. I know this will be the last time, and on this night, above all others—Christmas Eve—I must play upon it once more. I wish it; nay, I command it. Convey me to the church."

He was a good man; poor indeed, but charitable to a degree. Many churches had sought to engage him, and even the Archbishop had offered him a heap of gold to induce him to be the organist of the cathedral; but he would sooner part with life than leave his dear old organ at the convent church of Santa Inèz.

His organ was old, but so skilful were his hands, and so loving, that beneath them it pealed forth wonderful notes. Poor man! he had been blind from his birth; yet lately he had spoken of hopes of seeing. "Yes, and very soon," he would add, smiling, with a far-off look in his face; "I have already lived seventy-six years, and however long my life may be, I shall soon see —— in the spirit world."

So his wishes on this Christmas Eve were complied with, ill though he was. His friends conveyed him to church; he took his seat in the organ gallery, and the mass commenced.

When the clock of the cathedral was heard striking the hour of twelve, the first part of the mass had been performed, and the moment had come when the priest, after his consecration, proceeds to elevate the wafer. A cloud of incense—which rose up in blue undulating waves—filled the church. The bells rang with a vibrating sound, and Maese Perez placed his trembling hands upon the keys of the organ.

The hundred voices of its metal tubes resounded in a majestic chord, which was prolonged until it gradually died away as though a breeze of wind had ravished its last echoes. This first chord, which sounded like a voice rising from earth to heaven, was responded to by another, far distant and soft, but which continued swelling until it became a torrent of high-sounding harmony. It was like the voice of angels, traversing space and coming down to the world.

Then began to be heard a marvellous hymn, sounding from far away as though sung by hierarchies of seraphim: a thousand voices at once, yet which mingled together formed one alone. Yet even this was but an accompaniment to a still higher and more heavenly strain which seemed to float above this ocean of celestial music, like mists over the waves of the sea. Then the angelic voices of this heavenly choir became hushed one by one; only two voices remained at length answering each other—then one alone sustaining a divine clear note, like a vibrating beam of light. . . . .

The celebrant priest bowed low, and above his venerable, hoary head, and as though across a blue gauze formed by the incense cloud, the Host was raised. At that instant the note which Maese Perez held down opened wide and wider still, until a tremendous outburst of harmony

shook the church, reverberating in the compressed air of the angels; making the many-coloured windows tremble in their narrow frames. From each note of this magnificent chord a new power seemed to unfold itself; some strains near, others far off; some brilliant, others deep and low. It might truly be said that the waters, the birds, the breeze, and the waving fronds, men and angels, earth and heaven, were all singing in their own tongue a hymn of praise for the birth of a Saviour.

The crowd below were listening in astonishment and breathless silence. Tears flowed from every eye; each spirit was wrapt in profound ecstasy. The organ still resounded, but its tones were gradually dying away, like a voice passing from echo to echo, and becoming weaker as it departs further and further.

Suddenly a cry was heard in the organ-gallery, sharp and piercing —the shriek of a woman. The organ gave forth a strange, discordant sound, like a sob, and remained silent. That piercing cry had broken the religious ecstasy of the people; they rushed to the stairs leading to the gallery, every eye being turned in anxiety towards the spot. "What has happened? What is the matter?" was asked on all sides, as one of the attendants was returning, pale and sorrowful, to apprize the Archbishop of what had taken place.

"*Maese Perez has ceased to live!*"

And it was truly so. The poor organist had fallen forward over the keys of his ancient instrument, which still vibrated, but in a discordant manner; and his daughter, on her knees at his feet, was calling upon him in vain, in a voice broken by sobs and tears.

Another Christmas Eve had come round.

"Good evening, my Senora Dona Baltasara. You are not coming to-night to the midnight mass at Santa Inèz!"

"No, senor. It seems to be true that the organist of San Romano —that sour-eyed fellow, who is always finding fault with the performance of other organists—is to play on this Christmas night in the old place of Maese Perez. And you must know that no one—not even his daughter, who is a professor, and since her father's death entered the convent as a novice—has ventured to touch his instrument. For, accustomed to listen to such wonderful strains, who else would dare fill his place? After the community had decided that in honour of Maese Perez, and as a mark of respect to his memory, his organ should not be touched on this Christmas night, behold this man presents himself and says he dares to play upon it!"

"There is nothing more presumptuous than ignorance," I observed.

"But see how the crowds are flocking to the doorway, as though nothing were changed since last year; the same nobility, the same extravagance in dress, the same excitement in the porch. Alas! were the dead man to rise from his grave, he would die over again of grief that his organ should be desecrated by such hands.

See, the hero of this performance is coming! Come in; for the Archbishop has already arrived, and the mass is about to commence. Come, for it appears to me that the events of to-night will give us plenty to talk about."

Saying this, the good woman pushed her way into the church of Santa Inèz.

The service had already commenced. The church was brilliantly lit up, as in former years. The new organist, after kissing the Archbishop's ring before commencing to play, ascended the gallery, and swept his hands over the notes of the organ in an affectedly grave manner.

The long expected moment at last arrived—the moment when the priest elevates the Host. The bells began to ring, sounding like a shower of crystal notes; clouds of incense arose, and the organ note was heard.

The first note was harsh and discordant; but the second chord was powerful, magnificent, rising from the metal tubes of the organ, and swelling out like a cascade of harmony, inexhaustible and sonorous.

Celestial songs that greet the ear during moments of rapture; songs perceived by the spirit, yet which the lips cannot repeat; stray notes of some distant melody heard at intervals, as it is brought in the gust of the winds; murmur of leaves as they kiss each other, liquid and soft, like gentle rain; trills of larks rising from amongst the flowers like a dart shot up to the skies; resounding blasts without number, imposing and awe-inspiring, like the booming of thunder; winged hymns, falling from and re-ascending to the throne of God like a mighty torrent of light and sound—all this was expressed by the hundred voices of the organ, yet with more power, more mysterious poetry, and a more fantastic colouring than it had ever expressed before.

When the organist descended from the gallery, the crowd on the stairs who wished to see and congratulate him, was very great, and one of the attendants was obliged to clear a way through them to lead him up to the high altar, where the Archbishop was awaiting him.

"You see how I have come from my palace only to hear your playing," the Prelate said, when he was brought to him. "Will you be so cruel as Maese Perez, who never would save me this journey on Christmas night by coming to play during midnight mass in my cathedral?"

"Next year, your Eminence," replied the organist, "I promise to fulfil your request. Not for all the gold of the globe would I again perform on this organ."

"And why not?" demanded the Archbishop.

"Because," added the organist, as he endeavoured to master the emotion which was clearly manifested in the deathly pallor of his countenance, "because it is old and worthless, and cannot express all that is required." A strange answer!

And yet another year had passed away.

The Abbess of the Convent of Santa Inèz and the daughter of Maese Perez, were conversing together in a low tone, half concealed amid the shadows of the church choir. The small tinkling bell in the tower was calling the people to assemble, and a stray person or two would silently cross the porch and take a seat in some corner of the church, where the inhabitants of that neighbourhood were quietly waiting for midnight mass to commence.

"You can plainly perceive," the Abbess was saying, "that your fears are very childish. There is no one in the church here; all Seville is flocking to the cathedral. Do you play the organ to-night, my child, and play it confidently; for we shall be only in Community. But why do you continue silent? and why do you sigh?"

"I am so afraid, mother," the young novice replied in trembling accents.

"Afraid! and of what?"

"I know not—something supernatural. Last night, when I heard you say that you wished me to take the organ to-night during mass, I, proud of such a distinction, thought I would come and arrange the stops and tune the organ, in order to surprise you. I came to the choir—alone; I opened the door that leads to the organ gallery. The clock of the cathedral was striking some hour, I know not which, but the strokes of the bell were very sad and many, oh many! They continued their strokes during all the time that I remained nailed to the door, and those moments seemed to me an age. The church was empty and dark. There, at the farther end, shining like a lost star in the heavens of night, flickered a light—the light of the lamp that burns before the high altar. By its faint reflection, which only contributed to render more visible all the deep-felt gloom of the shadows, I saw, I saw *him!* Oh, mother! Do not doubt me! I saw a man, who, silently and with his back turned towards where I stood, was sweeping over the keys of the organ with one hand, whilst with the other he touched the stops—and the organ sounded, but in an indescribable manner. Each note was like a smothered sigh coming from within each of the metal tubes, and vibrated in the compressed air within, producing a hoarse strain, almost imperceptible, yet in perfect tune. And the clock of the cathedral continued striking, and that man still touched the keys. I thought I could even hear his breathing. Terror had chilled the blood in my veins. I felt a glacial cold spread itself over the whole of my body, and my temples seemed on fire, I tried to cry out but could not. That man had turned his head round and looked at me. —— I say wrong; he had not *looked* at me, for he was blind. It was my father!'

"Go, my daughter," the Abbess replied, "and put away these fantasias, by which the Evil Spirit endeavours to frighten and trouble weak and timid minds. Take courage; do as I bid you, and go

fearlessly to the organ gallery, for the mass is about to commence, and the people will be getting impatient."

The Abbess went across the choir to take her seat in the centre of the community. The daughter of Maese Perez opened the door of the gallery with a trembling hand, and proceeded to seat herself on the organ-bench ; and the mass commenced.

The mass began, and continued without anything occurring until the consecration. The organ was heard pealing at that moment, and an instant after a shriek from the daughter of Maese Perez rang through the church. The Abbess, the nuns, and the people all rushed to the gallery.

" Look at him ! look at him ! " the young novice was saying, fixing her staring eyes on the bench, from which she had risen in terror and astonishment, and holding on to the railing of the gallery.

All directed their looks towards that spot. The organ was deserted, yet it continued sounding. . . . Sounding as only archangels could imitate in their raptures of mystic rejoicing.

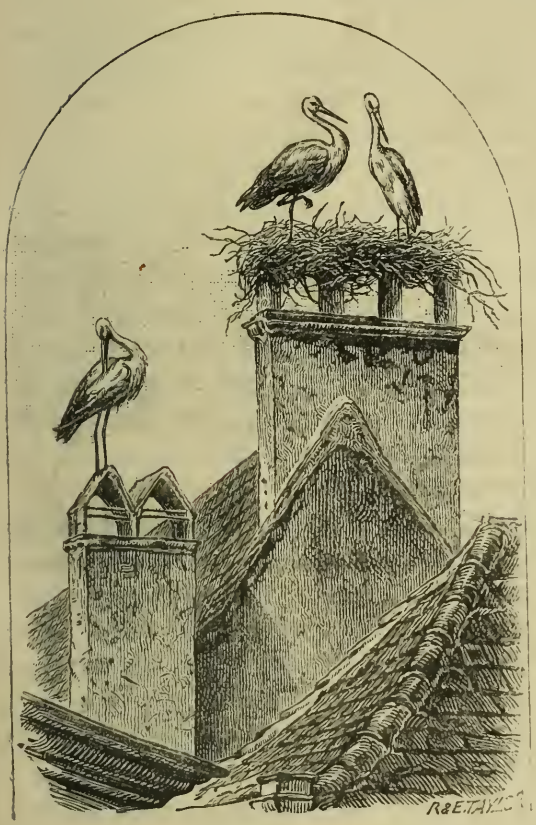
" Have I not told you a hundred times, my Senora Dona Baltasara, that here there are spirits ? Listen. You were not last evening at the midnight mass. Nevertheless, you must have heard what occurred, for nothing else is spoken of in Seville. My Lord Archbishop is furious, and without reason he gave up coming to Santa Inèz, as was his custom on Christmas night, and therefore did not witness the prodigy. And for what did he attend his cathedral ? Why, simply to hear a discordant jingle ; for those who heard it say that what the organist of San Bartolomé performed in the cathedral was nothing else. I always said that what we heard here last Christmas Eve certainly was never played by that sour-eyed fellow. No, indeed, he could not produce such music. There are spirits even in this world."

And in effect the spirit was neither more nor less than the spirit of Maese Perez, the blind organist of Seville.

A. M. L.

# IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.



Homes in the Black Forest.

THE lights of Queenborough, few and far between, served only to increase the gloom and render darkness yet more visible. Faint flashes were reflected here and there on the wet, smooth platform, and one felt rather than saw rain falling. A solitary passenger would have needed as careful piloting as the blind, through the tenebrous ways that led from the station to the boat; but the travellers were Legion, and followed each other like a flock of sheep or a string of turkeys; or any other simile that suggests a comparison between the animal and human world—only the sheep and the turkeys would have been far more picturesque and interesting.

Certainly, when the saloon lights (a blaze of brilliance after the late blackness of darkness) threw their magnificent beams upon the assemblage as it poured down the staircase with a rushing sound as of an artillery charge (we all know the sound and the sequel), a more grotesque group could scarcely have been seen. Englishmen, with loud voices and apparently a power of being in all places at once; Germans, with blue spectacles and wide-open mouths; all struggling with huge carpet bags and with each other for precedence. Finally they fell into rank; a long *queue* was formed, and each in his turn received from the steward a ticket and a number indicating his night quarters on board.

A bad and unpleasant system to begin with. To have to make one of a string of travellers; to find your neighbour treading upon your heels, digging into your ribs, putting you to torture with the irons of his carpet bag or the edge of his hat box, all thrust upon you with

unceremonious freedom : to have to endure all this for half an hour or so (if the passengers are numerous), with the boat rocking like a cradle, is enough to try the strongest constitution and destroy the temper of an angel. Luckily for me I was better provided, and could look on with such a smile of peace and serenity as you may often see on the face of a Chinese image (benevolent, superior, but provoking) ; but this side view only enabled one the better to observe the unpopularity of the system. It was quite a lottery ; each traveller had to take what was given him—and was expected to be thankful : no remark or remonstrance met with the slightest attention. One, who had telegraphed for a cabin, was coolly told that he had it. So he had, and it was the very worst in the whole vessel.

As to the boats : the upper deck cabins were so badly ventilated that probably none ventured to sleep with closed doors ; the lower deck cabins must have been worse than the Black Hole of Calcutta. I often wonder, too, why, on board all boats, the berths should be so hard, that for ease and comfort you might just as well lie down upon the floor. Here, if anywhere, a couch that will give you some chance of sleep is necessary, and if spring mattresses were substituted for hard planks, managers and directors would secure the gratitude of the world, and find themselves deluged with popularity and pieces of plate —testimonials from an appreciative public.

Altogether, I thought the crossing viâ Queenborough and Flushing so little comfortable and agreeable that, rather than endure it a second time, I returned by way of Brussels and Calais—and felt that I had done well. But the Flushing route is cheap, popular, and very much frequented ; and anyone at all fastidious in these matters must expect to have the keen edge of his sensibilities somewhat roughly handled.

The scanty lights of Queenborough and Sheerness flashed out a friendly farewell as we steamed away. Soon all was left far behind ; a drizzling rain was falling ; one by one the passengers disappeared, like stars before the summer dawn (by far too poetical a comparison for the occasion) ; the decks were left to solitude and the officers.

Early next morning the long, low, flat shores of Holland gladdened one with a sight of land. Windmills, as usual, were conspicuous ; cottages with white walls, and green shutters, and red-tiled roofs, stood out in picturesque contrast ; stunted trees invited cattle to their shade ; long broad reaches of green meadows stretched away and away in velvety softness. But this morning the cattle had no need of shade ; it was sunshine that was absent ; a steady downpour of rain was doing its best to depress mankind. As to the crowd now filling the decks—if it looked quaint and grotesque last night, what sort of an appearance did it present this morning? Unshaven, unkempt, every mark of a hasty toilet or no toilet at all, haggard and weary, thoroughly wretched, noisy, gesticulating—it might have been a cargo of restored lunatics from Bedlam, or an importation of wild men and women from the backwoods of America

For a whole hour after landing at Flushing we were caged up in the close and certainly not clean station restaurant. On all sides were sounds of eating and drinking, driving sensitive ears to the verge of madness. A brisk trade was driven in raw ham placed between little rolls; sausages flavoured with garlic disappeared as by magic; coffee, beer, and tea threw their exhalations around, according to the taste and temperament of the individual. But all disagreeables were over and to be remembered no more when the room was exchanged for a comfortable carriage, and we went onwards. Henceforth there were no more unpleasant hours, even until that day when once more I saw the white cliffs of Dover open up to welcome our vessel advancing from the shores of Calais.

We steamed through the flat country of Holland; and, in spite of the dismal day, the old richness of colouring, for which the Netherlands is so remarkable, stood out conspicuously. Long stretches of pasture met the eye; low, melancholy trees swaying in the wind and weeping abundantly; dykes in all directions, without which Holland might soon add to its name, "In the Marshes;" here and there, standing on the very edge of these dykes and gazing at its own sweet image, a subdued stork, drooping on one leg, apparently lost in contemplation; wondering, perhaps, why it rains so often and so much in that dear old Holland, where water is so abundant and despised that the worthy Dutchman still follows the example of his great ancestor, Mynheer van Dunck, and in mixing his Schiedam keeps his proportions to a quart of the former and "a pint of the latter daily." Nor is he altogether in the wrong, for Schiedam at its best is an excellent thing, and not to be trifled with.

Making way, the clouds occasionally broke, and a gleam of sunshine—and of Paradise—burst upon the delighted vision. Great shadows swept over the land, "rolling in glorious array." But it was soon over; the gates would close again behind the sunshine, and the rain come down with more energy than ever.

There were stoppages, too, every now and then, at quaint Dutch towns, with old-fashioned buildings that promised to repay one's love for antiquity, if we would sojourn there awhile. But to-day no such sojourn entered into our plan; onward and forward was the inevitable motto, out of Holland into Fatherland. I know not whether it was fancy or imagination, but it seemed that one could almost trace the boundary line separating Holland from Germany, so quickly changed the character of the country; just as I have often fancied it possible to discern that which separates England from Scotland.

Certainly, very soon after quitting Holland, the German hills and undulations plainly declared that we were in a new country and amongst another race. And still on we went, and still wept the skies, until, at two o'clock, above a broad, flat, surrounding plain, the grand towers and steeples of Cologne Cathedral reared heavenwards; and, passing by strong fortifications (of which the Germans are so

fond) and busy signs of the life of a large town, the train came to a tand at Cologne station.

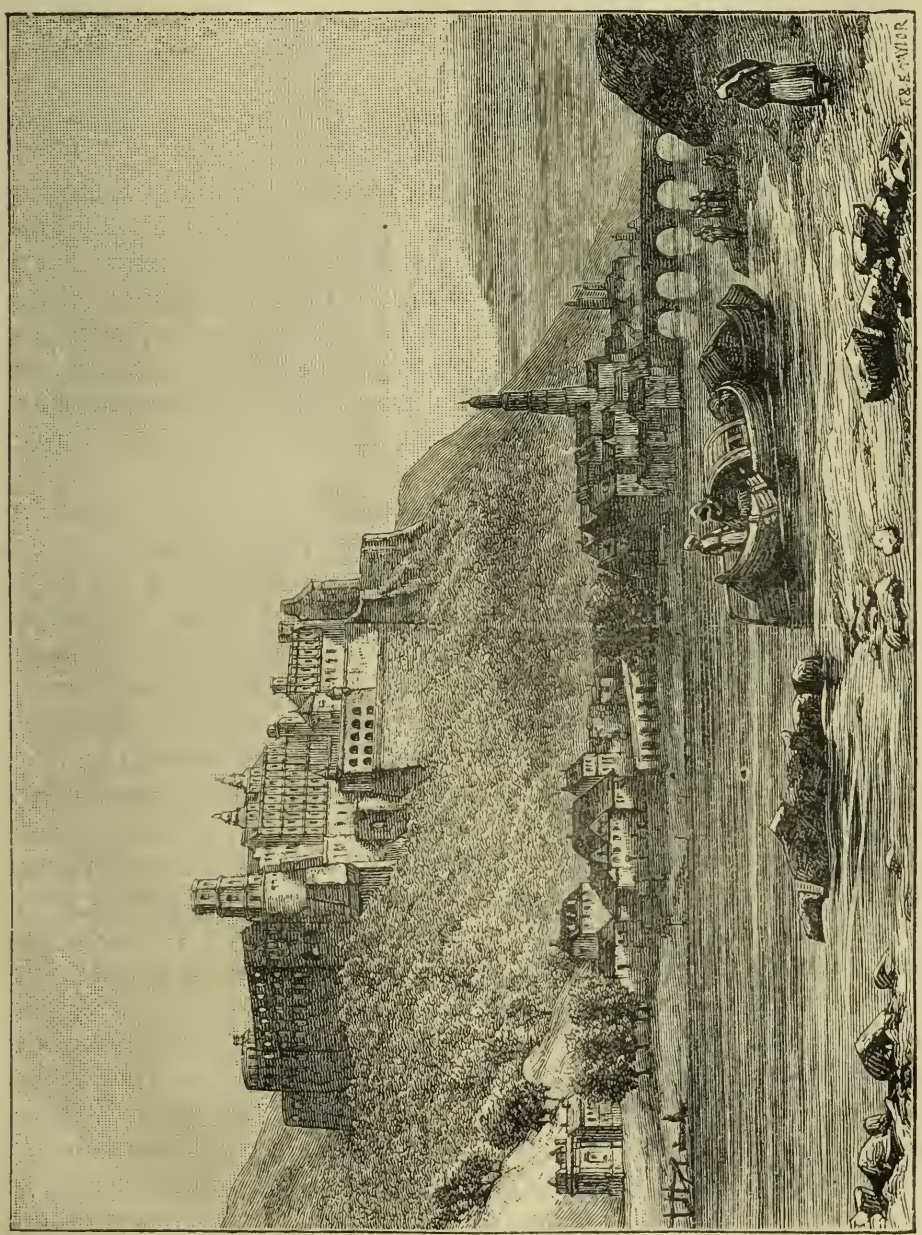
Were it not for its cathedral Cologne would be nothing in the world but a town on a very uninteresting part of the Rhine: a rallying point for those who are going up the river and have its beauties before them, or for those who have come down and left all behind. If the Rhine at Cologne has any grand feature, it lies in its breadth; and gazing from the heights of the railway bridge, it is not without a certain noble attraction, to which is added all the romance of its history and reputation; a romance which casts its halo over it, even to the tame shores of Holland.

But the cathedral is the one great attraction of Cologne. It throws its weird influence over the otherwise commonplace town, and draws its votaries from the very ends of the earth. Some of our favourite stories of childhood have been of the wondrous building which the Archfiend would never allow to be completed; tales of the Seven Sins; taking hold of the imagination as powerfully as any fairy tale, or the Arabian Nights. And amongst the child-dreams of many of us has been the hope that, in the far-distant future, we might live to gaze upon that wonderful structure that we fully believed was never the work of man alone.

The old guide conducted me to the Triforium gallery, and we made the circuit of the cathedral, looking down upon that amazing extent of white stone, that multitude of arches and pillars. Then, passing out to the exterior gallery, where you get so fine a view of the town, and the Rhine, and the far-off Seven Mountains that stand out so conspicuously on approaching Bonn, he pointed upwards to the figures of Faust and Mephistopheles, stretching out, like a couple of gurgoyles, gazing at each other—and for ever gazing—from opposite corners.

Straightway we fall into a reverie of years ago, when the story was first familiar to us. As in a vision, there arose a quiet, far-off home, in a foreign land, where "the daily round, the common task," was sweetened by all that makes home blest; where twilight evenings were consecrated to tales of wonder and marvel that influenced our child-minds with an undying power: legends in which this spot and building played no ill a part. Then a grey mist blurred the scene, representing the chasm of intervening years; years that are to most so full of unfruitful hopes and aspirations, that, like our Spanish Castles, come to nought; a time when we thought so fondly our life's barque would sail for ever in the smooth waters of a southern wind, but oh, the rough waves of a prevalent east! Then all fell away to the realities of the present: the pain and mystery of life that is never absent from some minds: as the voice of the old guide awoke the echoes, asking, with a touch of excusable impatience, "If the Herr had done gazing at Faust and Mephistopheles, and was ready to proceed?"

So we came back to earth, figuratively and literally; and returned to the body of the wonderful structure, and gazed upwards, as we had just gazed downwards, at the immense height, the wonderful beauty of the arches, the forest of pillars, the glorious aisles. Yet, with all



HEIDELBERG.

this beauty before me, was the promise or early dreams fulfilled—the anticipated pleasure of bygone years realized? A thousand times NO. When is it ever? It is the difference between fact and fancy, romance and reality; between looking at a picture and looking at real life.

I left it all behind the next morning in the express, bound for

Baden-Baden, where one fairly enters within the territories of the Black Forest. Passing through a considerable extent of flat, uninteresting plain, the train entered the Valley of the Rhine. Hills and romantic crags rose right and left, vineyards and gardens giving a certain cultivated luxuriance to the slopes, fantastic châteaux adding life and spirit to the hillsides. These vineyards from a distance are less picturesque—it has been said before—than our hop-gardens in England; but a closer inspection brings out the beauty of the leaf, the delicacy of the tendril, the grace of the drooping fruit—and then comparison yields in favour of the latter.

Between the hills the river flowed in its course to the sea, growing tamer and yet more tame towards Cologne, losing all life and beauty, its very colour, as it runs through the Dutch territories and expires. But at Bonn and upwards all the romance begins; all that strange wonder of crag and rock, romantic towns and villages, and ruined castles; valleys stretching far away, and hills rising above and behind each other; the thousand and one legends, supernatural and otherwise, that have enshrined the river in the hearts of the German people.

To-day it was so shallow as to lose much of its grandeur. Steamers passed us on their way to Cologne, crowded with tourists, consisting for the most part of English, Dutch, and Americans. For the Dutch have taken a fancy of late years to travel in search of the picturesque, and enlarge their views of life by observing the minds, manners, and morals of other nations. The Germans, too, in large numbers seem to be following this example; so that presently we shall become a world of travellers, and the resources of the ingenious will be taxed to provide for the necessities of a wandering, though not Hebrew, race.

The train went on through many a well-known spot; pausing now at good old Darmstadt, now at romantic Heidelberg, with its surrounding hills and vales, its wonderful old castle. You may pace those ruined terraces on a moonlit night, and fancy a ghost lurking in every shadow. As indeed there is—the ghosts of departed glory and grandeur, whose name is legion; the ghosts of a thousand marvellous tales of superstition and wonder. And you turn your gaze to the broad-flowing river far below, upon which the moon is casting her jewelled rays; you gaze and gaze, and fancy each moment that Undine, with pale loveliness and floating tresses, will rise and bid you plunge beneath the calm surface to her fairy palace; a bidding you will have no power to disobey.

But to-day it was all broad daylight, prosy as anything can be in these regions of beauty and romance: where the very atmosphere possesses a quality that stirs the imagination, and for the time plunges you into a world where realities dissolve and the ideal cheats you into the belief of happiness. And every now and then, for one moment—is it not so?—the burden of life falls away with as great relief

as the pack fell from the back of Christian; and a strange soul-sense steals over the spirit, begotten of all this divine beauty of creation, that, while it lasts, is surely a foretaste of a celestial world. A sense, evanescent as a vapour, fleeting as the trail of a meteor; almost as soon gone as it is come; within us, yet seemingly as far off and intangible as the flush of sunset, which one moment colours a passing cloud and dies the next.

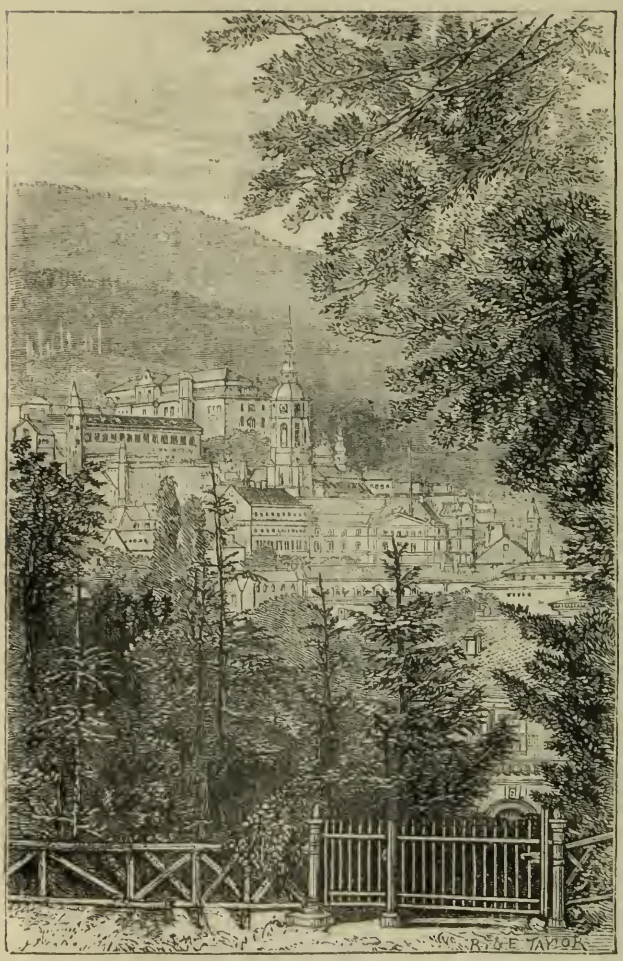
The beauties of nature, and also certain strains of perfect music, address themselves to the infinite in man, find their response, and, for a moment, raise him to Paradise. And though it is but for a moment; and though the floodgates of that sudden glory fall back and close, and leave him cold, and dark, and disconsolate, yet it has been a vision, an experience; it is never forgotten, and he is the better for it for ever after. It is an earnest of a time coming when the "burden of this mortality" shall have given place to an ideal which the spirit recognizes even here, but the mind fails to apprehend.

It was prosy daylight to-day, but the prosiness lurking on the banks of the Rhine, and peering out of the ruined turrets and crumbling walls of Heidelberg Castle, would form an inexhaustible mine of romance elsewhere. The train soon left the river, and passed onwards, still through loveliest country; amidst vineyards and great stretches of land planted with waving Indian grass and huge pumpkins, and the large strong leaf of the tobacco plant; hop-gardens here and there, growing to a giant height unknown in England. Mountains always in view; now near, as the valley closed in; now so far off that their soft wavy undulations faded into space. Between five and six o'clock we entered the lovely district surrounding Baden-Baden, the pine-clad hills that announce the region of the Black Forest, and at length the train passed into the shelter of the station—shelter much needed, for there came down a shower of hail the like of which I had scarcely ever seen; that cruel hail that does come down in this land in the hottest weather, and is so dreaded by the vine growers.

Few towns equal Baden-Baden in the beauty of its situation and surroundings: no spot in the Black Forest abounds more in romantic drives and short, charming excursions, where day after day you may choose some fresh elevation for your pilgrimage, and gaze down upon a widespread view. You may get more closely into the beauty of the Forest, the woods and trees and their enchanting solitudes; but Baden-Baden is favoured in all ways. As a sojourn it is gay and pleasant; and you may combine duty with amusement by drinking the waters (very brimstone-y some of them are, as though Mephistopheles had once given rendezvous to Faust here, and had beguiled the time he was kept waiting by stirring them up with his tail), and listening to the band that plays here thrice daily.

The Kursaal, or Conversation-house, is a magnificent building, where balls are held during certain nights of the season. In one

of its wings there is a café and restaurant, largely patronised and loudly appreciated: in the other is a gorgeous reading-room, equally frequented, but where absolute silence reigns. Several old duennas aroused one's curiosity, as to what their past lives and histories had been. One of them especially, old and withered, bore traces still of a once marvellous beauty. Daily she came, daily sat in the same seat, read the same newspapers and studied the politics of the world. She was wonderfully arrayed; a young girl's dress upon an old woman; but there was a melancholy in her eyes it made one melancholy to see. Evidently she regretted the days of her lost youth and beauty—a regret that is so keen and bitter; regretted the palmy days of Baden, when gambling was the fashion and the rage, the ruin and despair of multitudes. Of a certainty she had taken part in that fatal excitement; one could see it almost written upon her features, still handsome and aristocratic in their old age. A vain woman of the world, who had found out that the world, taken from her point of view, was altogether unsatisfying and a mistake.



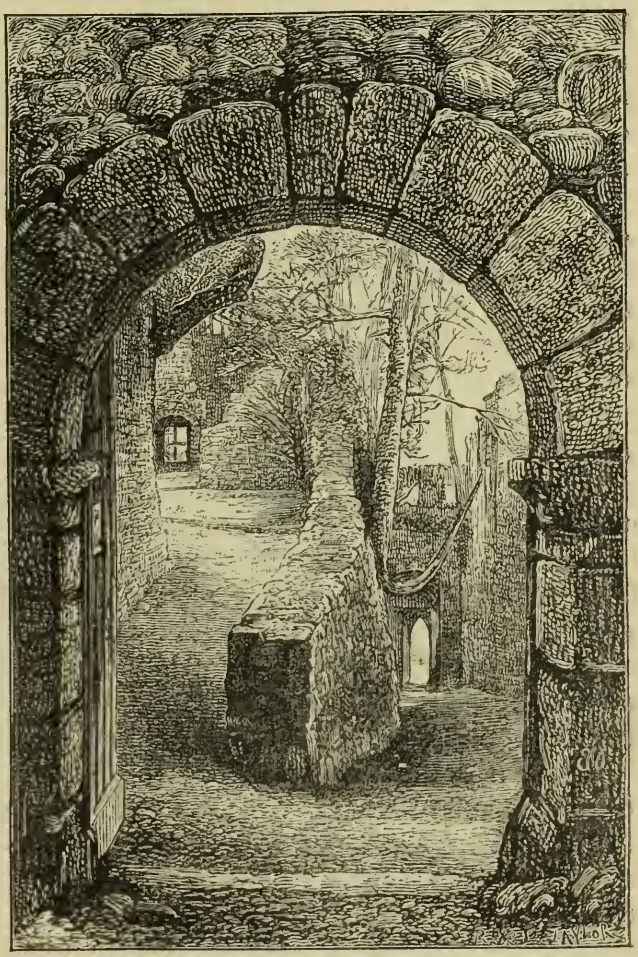
BADEN-BADEN, WITH VIEW OF THE NEW CASTLE.

Another old coquette would sit every night at the open window, airing her faded beauty, and wondering why she ceased to attract admiration. Such characters are to be found in all Continental watering places, to which fashion and a crowd periodically resort, and the excitement of bygone life is fed by an artificial substitute, without which these poor frail minds and bodies would cease to be.

Sit there of an evening, in the gardens, watching the crowds strolling about, or occupying the chairs and benches, talking in animated groups, or listening to the music, and what a different scene it all is from anything to be found in England. It appeals, no doubt,

to the lighter and more volatile part of our nature; but then, it must be remembered, as a dead and gone friend used to say, that volity is not frivolity. The scene is at least gay and enlivening, unbends the mind, and is all innocent enough.

The English do not understand amusing themselves after this manner; they are more heavy even than the Germans, at any rate in their recreations. And, taking us all round, are we one bit the better? Probably our climate has as much to do with it as anything. How is it possible to go in for alfresco concerts and entertainments when we scarcely know one day whether the temperature of the next will be Siberian or Indian?



Entrance to the Old Castle.

Baden-Baden lies in a hollow or depression; its villas are dotted about in romantic, irregular positions; a stream runs through it, spanned here and there by a small rustic bridge; long avenues, shaded by trees — of which the Lichtenthal is the principal—form pleasant drives and walks. Nothing can well be prettier than Baden itself—except its surroundings. On all sides rise the hills of the Black Forest, dark and dense to their very summits with pine woods. Here and there an old ruined castle stands out, suggestive of a bygone age of martial glory, and chivalry, and gay cavaliers who loved, and "laughed and rode away."

One of the pleasantest excursions is that to the Old Castle, the most conspicuous of the ruins, an hour's uphill walk from the town. The houses are soon left behind, and the air is laden with the perfume of acacias as you begin to ascend. Before you are the pine-clad hills, looking cool, dense and majestic, as if nothing disturbed their serenity. To the right is a green vale, through which runs a stream

of clear, rippling water. The banks are clad with an emerald green, that stands out in vivid, refreshing contrast with that far-off background of sombre heights.

Soon the New Castle is reached, a building old enough to satisfy an antiquarian, and only called new in contradistinction to the Old Castle—now long since gone to wreck and ruin. I turned into the New Castle, as in duty bound, and inspected the state rooms, where hung portraits of dead and gone members of the Grand Ducal Family, and of the Royal Families of Europe with which they have intermarried in the course of centuries. One of the fairest and pleasantest faces was that of Louisa, Queen of Prussia, taken when almost a girl, and full of sweetness as well as firmness of character.

The dungeons were, perhaps, the most interesting part of the castle, where Lynch law is said to have reigned, and tortures and horrors to have been committed in past ages. Such an atmosphere still clings about them. The old woman who conducted us (some half a dozen Germans were waiting the inspection when I entered) led the way down a mysterious and gloomy staircase of thick masonry, terminating in a square chamber, damp and earthy, the abode, it might well be, of "innumerable creeping things."

Here she opened a suspicious looking closet, which seemed full of instruments of torture and miniature gallows. But these, on closer inspection, turned out to be nothing more terrible than lanterns, and long tallow candles on flat pieces of wood. Lighting them, she gave us one each, and we filed off one after the other, a weird procession headed by a woman, going to do battle with the powers of darkness. So we marched through the chambers, flashing out such feeble rays into the gloom as our lanterns gave forth.

Massive walls surrounded us; thick doors composed of one huge block of stone, that scarcely yielded to the whole weight of the body. For a moment the heart of the assembled group stood still, and the old woman's face turned pale, as she swung one of these heavy doors behind us, and swung it too far: there was neither bolt nor bar nor handle to bring it back. We thought ourselves entombed in a room whose walls were many feet thick, whence no voice or sound could reach to the outer, breathing world. Not an enviable position, for soon our candles would expire, and leave us in the blackness of darkness. The little group began to feel a sense of suffocation, of being walled up alive. No bell here to sound an alarm.

"There are times when I verily believe the spirit of the evil deeds of the past still lurks in these dungeons," cried our conductress. "Only once before has this abominable door served me this trick; and then, as now, it seemed as if invisible hands had pushed-to the heavy stone work and oiled the rusty hinges."

"The spirit of a demon," suggested one; "Mephistopheles himself, perhaps thirsting for more victims: enraged that we have fallen upon

enlightened times, and that Baden is under the rule of the good Grand Duke."

"You may say that," cried the woman. "A good duke indeed. He might well be called the father of his people."

"For pity's sake," cried another, "cease this gossiping, and open the door of the tomb if you can. What on earth would become of us shut up here, without light, or air, or any means of rescue? We should soon be dead."

The woman laughed.

"I think," she said, "an hour or two's close confinement would set us free. My good man would miss me at the dinner hour, or rather he would miss the signs of preparation. And though possibly he might be willing to leave me to my fate," she added, with a humorous grin, "yet, for the sake of his dinner, he would seek me out. We all know the way to a man's heart."

"Donnerwetter!" cried he who had remonstrated before, "are you going to keep us here suffocating until it is too late? I feel half dead already."

The woman turned upon him a look of supreme disdain. "This room is called the Question Chamber," she explained in the most tantalizing manner, whilst the door stood yet closed and we in jeopardy. "Near by is a dark passage, leading to a trap-door, called the 'Virgin's Kiss.' It is said that victims were thrown down this trap-door on to the statue of a woman covered with sharp instruments, which cut and mangled the poor wretch until he bled to death. Ai! ai! Men at their worst are awful creatures indeed!"

With that she carefully inserted her fingers to the side of the stone, and in a few moments the door rolled back, and we were free men and women once more.

"I believe," said I, "that all this time you have merely been playing upon the fears of your audience. You knew well enough that you had the door under control. Confess now."

The woman looked slily up out of the corners of her eyes; she had evidently a turn for jokes and dry humour.

"Mein Herr," she replied, somewhat in the spirit of an oracle, "those who travel must expect to see strange sights and encounter singular adventures. I knew *you* were not very alarmed at our imprisonment. As for these Germans," lowering her voice, "a little fright now and then does them no harm and does me good. They ask me all kinds of questions, give me no end of trouble, keep me waiting twice as long as anyone else does, and in the end, for the most part forget that the labourer is worthy of his hire."

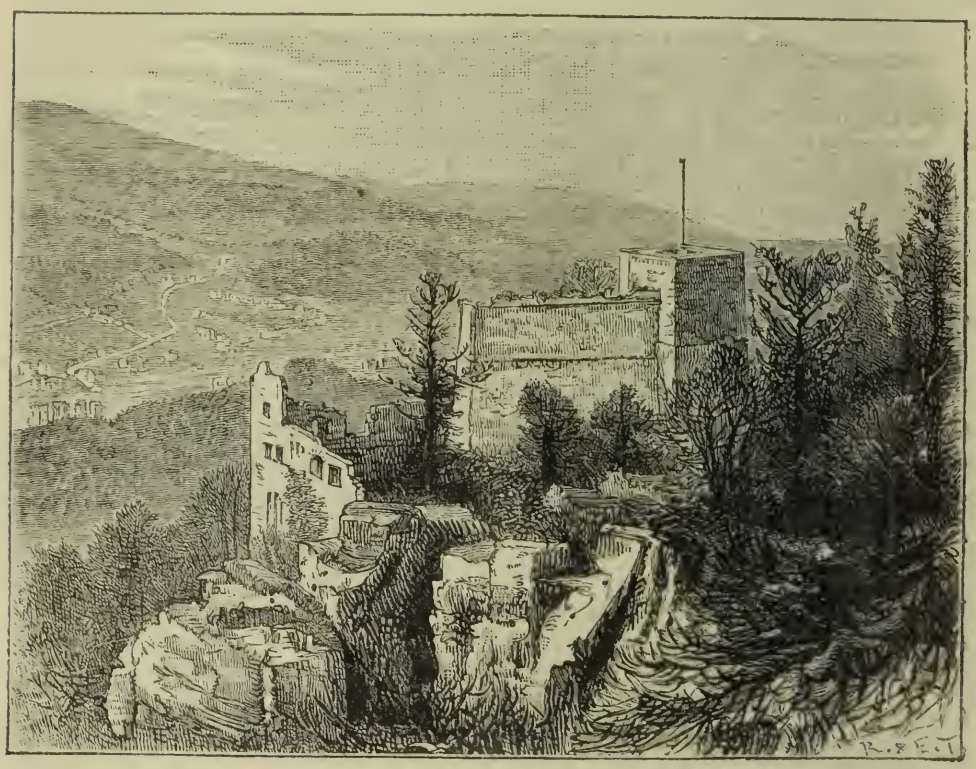
There was no greediness in the remark, no delicate attempt at a hint; it came out so spontaneously that it was evidently meant simply as the statement of a fact, a bit of her experience, and nothing more.

We filed back with our lanterns, a released procession; and,

presently, issued out again into the pure air and blue skies, twice pure and blue after those dismally attractive dungeons.

I continued my solitary, but by no means lonely way towards the Old Castle, mounting high and higher, beneath pine trees, through footpaths that were short cuts upwards: nothing before me but the dead wall of mountain and forest; jutting rocks here and there conspicuous; melancholy, beautiful firs fringing the outlines of the summits.

After a good bit of ascending, steep only towards the end, a turn in the road brought me to the old ruin, at the foot of



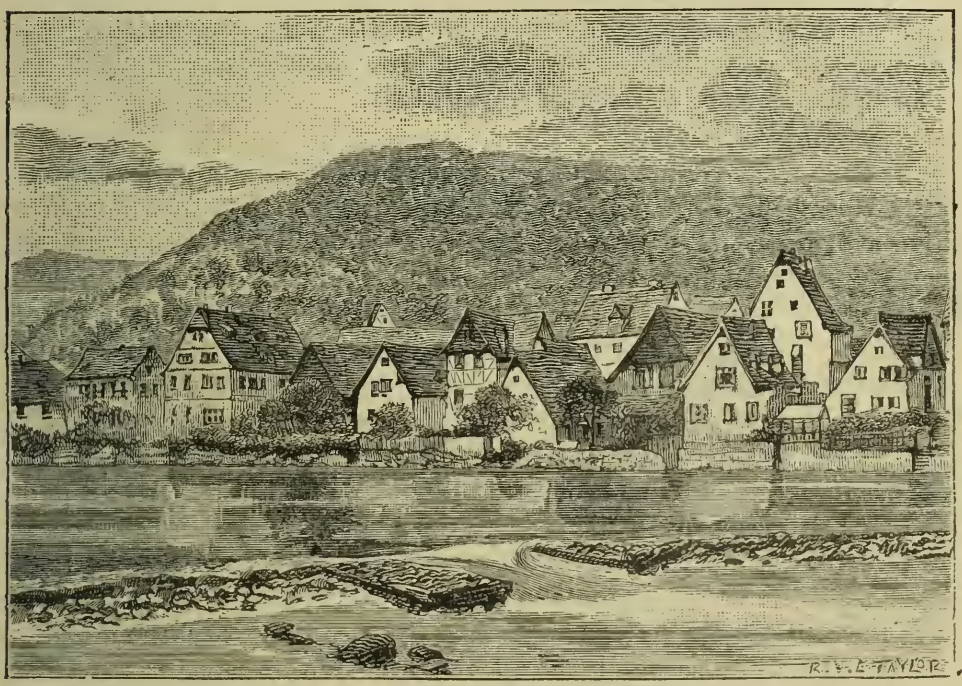
THE OLD CASTLE.

which a photograph stall strangely blended together past and present. On through the old gateway, and leaving a restaurant to the left (to what ends of the earth will you wander and *not* find a restaurant?), I was soon amidst crumbling walls and ruined arches, and stairs more picturesque in decay than in their youth. Lordly halls these rooms must have been, in bygone generations, when fair dames and gallant cavaliers graced them, and merry voices echoed far and near, and distant horns rang through the vast woods.

The first thing to arrest attention was the weird sound of an Æolian harp, which seemed to linger in the air. But, mounting the crumbling stairs and passing round a terrace protected by a railing, it was discovered in one of the ancient windows, secured by iron bars. The day was boisterous, and the instrument kept up an incessant

shriek, most mournful, most melancholy; "like the wail of a soul in pain." It might have been the long-drawn sighs of a familiar spirit of the place, for ever haunting it, ever restless and unhappy. Now it seemed to scream above the tops of the trees, now to whirl round and round the ruined walls, and fill the air with its agony. It was out of harmony with the place, and destroyed all its solitude and solemnity.

But what a view met the eye on all sides! Far down, sleeping in a hollow, lay Baden, a small spot of civilized life amidst the vast surrounding plains and fields of creation. At one's feet stood the outer portions of the castle in jagged and crumbling ruins; the trees



GERNSBACH, NEAR BADEN.

within their precincts of a purer, livelier green than those beyond. Surrounding the town the mountains rose in chains and piles, hill after hill, and tier beyond tier, an eternity of forest and verdure, as it seemed: hills clothed with the dark pines that give so sad yet true a name to the Black Forest. The walls of the ruined castle were overgrown with moss and lichen and numberless creepers.

Fringes of pines displayed themselves in the immediate neighbourhood, each one distinct and detached from the other; but beyond, and far away as the eye could follow, the black mountains accumulated in dense dark masses and outlines. Stretches of velvety fields and slopes here and there relieved the gloom. White roads twisted, snake-like, about the vast scene. To the right stretched great uninteresting plains, the flowing Rhine a conspicuous object, but here not more romantic than the tamest of rivers. In the distance rose the long chain of the Vosges

mountains, with their soft, wavy, graceful undulations, though too far off to be very conspicuous or interesting. Small streams ran their course, and villages dotted the plain, their red roofs rising in contrast with the sombre pines. The wind swept great white clouds across the sky, bringing out the blue beyond in deep relief, whilst they cast huge shadows upon the plain that chased each other and dissolved as the clouds died out in space.

I gazed long at the scene: that marvellous picture of nature of which one never tires, no matter how often it may be repeated. One tree, one stream, one field, one hill, may resemble another, but a thousand times multiplied and a thousand times seen, the last look is as fresh and beautiful to the mind, as invigorating to the spirit, as the first. The only sad spot was the ruin itself, which spoke so loudly of an age and generation when other eyes were gazing upon those scenes; as, in turn, other eyes again will gaze, when these days have long passed into history.

Coming down from the ruin, the woman who kept a stall of carved wood work espied a victim, cried up her wares and strove hard to drive a bargain. But with the best intentions in the world one can scarcely perambulate a whole day through a forest with a cuckoo clock in one hand and a pair of elegant chimney ornaments in the other. So, for the sake of helping a fellow creature, ever so slightly, on the difficult road of life, the traveller falls back upon the small objects that fit into the pocket. And if the reduction in price is not quite in proportion to the difference in size and labour, he quietly shuts his eyes to the fact. We have so often to close our eyes to a good deal that is going on in this bad world.

A last look at the Old Castle, and branching off to the left I presently came to the rough steps cut out of the gigantic rocks that look towards Baden; steps that lead to the summit of the heights, whence again one sees all the glorious view, but from a somewhat different point. Next I found myself in the thick of the wood, revelling in the loneliness, and dense, almost appalling solitude. Not a bird was visible, not a chirp was heard; and more or less throughout the Black Forest this absence of bird life is somewhat conspicuous. Perhaps they are better heard and seen in the spring; occasionally, when remarking to the inhabitants upon the strange absence of the feathered tribe, they seemed aggrieved, and thought they had as many birds as other lands. If it be so, certainly in that merry month of August of which I write they had taken to themselves wings, and gone off on a pilgrimage of love or duty.

To plunge into the thick of the wood, to wander at will, to have the small excitement of losing and recovering your way, this is really to enjoy to the utmost the resources of the Black Forest, or of any forest. The spots unmentioned in guide books, the tracks unbeaten by the ordinary tourist—it is these that charm. Never can I forget that long, lonely, glorious walk after leaving the Old Castle. Hour

after hour, and still the woods never ceased. No one interrupted the solitude; I was utterly alone—like Robinson Crusoe on his desert island: no trace that man inhabited the earth, save here and there a stack of wood neatly piled up; young trees sawn into logs, and bearing testimony that now, as in the primæval days, "man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour."

Ferns and bracken grew in profusion of loveliest, purest green; wild flowers abounded: paths led in all directions—one knew not whither. Mile after mile the sombre pines seemed inexhaustible. Long vistas of forest ground, lovely glades, opened up continually, chequered by lights and shades, and long-drawn shadows cast by the sun as it struggled through the pines. To stand awhile and listen was to realize the intensity of silence; no chirping of birds, "mate answering to mate," or flutter of wings, or ring of woodman's axe. Utter solitude. In all senses of the word it was refreshing and restoring to mind, body, and spirit.

At length a village, sounds of life and sights of human habitation, though not on a large scale. A quaint, picturesque village, with whitewashed houses and blackened rafters, and creepers over the porches; great fuchsias and roses and geraniums. Plum trees grew in the middle of the road, and grapes trailed their leaves and fruit over the walls of the cottages up to the very roofs. In many of them the ground floor was turned into a stable and abandoned to the animals. Here and there a pretty, laughing face peeped inquisitively from a latticed window, set off by a framework of green leaves. The few children in the road, all with naked feet, ran away as if they had suddenly espied an arch enemy, but quickly returned and made friends when bribed by the offer of an infinitesimal coin. Evidently these little people had been taught wisdom in their generation.

Presently I came to the cemetery, a humble, melancholy little spot, where many newly made graves had small crosses tied round with ragged white muslin. There was nothing here to cause one to linger, and passing out I chanced upon a young lad of some ten or twelve years, as quick and intelligent as if he had been brought up in a town, and far more picturesque. We immediately struck up a firm understanding, under the influence of which he told me his little history and his little life with a charm and a naïveté and an innocence —ah, how much to be envied!

There was a strange and unaccountable refinement about him, somewhat sad to see, for it was almost out of place; suggesting delicacy of health, or a nature worthy of a better lot. And when I asked him his name, and in the gentlest and most musical of voices he replied "Walde," my heart went out to this little namesake. He was barefooted, and dressed very raggedly, his small knickerbockers all holes and fringes; but in spite of it all the lad was innately a little gentleman; and would be; until, growing up to manhood, and mixing with his kind,

less favoured than he, his finer nature would lose its sensitiveness And better so, perhaps.

I longed to carry off the lad, and work upon the soil that looked as if it might be fruitful—wood that would bear carving. But how many wishes and ideas flash through the heart or the brain in the course of a lifetime that it would be difficult or impossible to carry out? And after all, a tree usually thrives best on its own soil. He who rises by his own endeavours gains the necessary experience with each step; but suddenly transplant a young nature, and failure is very likely to be the end of it.

He was quite a little scholar, this Walde, and knew a good deal about geography and history for a lad so far out of the world. His father had long been dead, and his mother kept the house together by washing for the great people in Baden. They had a hard struggle for it, but managed to get along somehow. He had brothers and sisters, but was the eldest of all.

Seeing the little fellow was rather happy in his company, and by no means anxious to part, we agreed that he should accompany me to the ruins of the castle on the hill just above us: ruins as old, apparently, but not quite so extensive as those I had visited that morning. We climbed the hill as far as the inevitable restaurant, and the little fellow ran off for the key, and piloted me upwards (where no guide was wanted, but it was a pleasant delusion on both sides), and together we surveyed the wonders of nature; and together admired them: the one lost in contemplation of the perfect scene; the other, perhaps, in wonder that so much trouble should be taken for so small a recompense: merely a view that was to him a matter of everyday life.

On our way back we were overtaken by a sudden shower, and sheltered in a cottage doorway, that portion of it given up to barn work and the chopping of wood. Out came the good woman of the house, and with an air that really might have become a duchess, pressed me to enter and be seated. The offer declined with equal politeness—I saw that she was at her evening meal—she remained standing at the door, only too glad to have a chat with one lately arrived from the far-off world.

Her good man was out at work, she said, carpentering: her cats, too, were in the fields, hunting mice, of which they had an abundance. She was quite alone with her little daughter and niece, who now appeared on the scene, the latter delicate and deformed, and needing frequent visits to the doctor, said the aunt. Yes, she knew little Walde; everyone knew him; he was a general favourite; a good boy, and went regularly to school. His mother was hard-working; but when the man was gone from the household, the woman's hardest work was, after all, not much better than starvation.

But the shower and the clouds passed, out came the sun again, and Walde and I continued our way. The pleasant and intelligent woman dismissed me with a hearty hand-shake, evidently delighted at having

entertained a stranger (though she little knew how very far from an angel) unawares.

Walde and I parted where three roads met, at the foot of a large road-side cross of which so many are seen in the Black Forest. I held before him two silver coins, one double the value of the other. He was sharp enough to choose the weightier.

"If I give it you, what will you do with it?" I said.

"Buy books for school," he replied.

Was it quite a truthful answer, Walde? Or were you, too, wise in your generation? I would rather believe the former, and so will believe it. Let us keep our faith as long as we can in this weary world. Rude awakenings, one after another, come all too soon, as surely as night follows day: bitter becomes our sweet, shattered our idols; vanished our ideals; and at last we see the Infinite Wisdom that upon this world and all it contains has stamped the motto: THIS TOO SHALL PASS AWAY.

Walde turned to the right, towards his home, I to the left, towards Baden. The lad looked after me until we were lost to each other. I went on my solitary way—somewhat happier, perhaps, for having made him happy; yet melancholy, too, at having lost sight for good and all of a singularly interesting little fellow.

Walde, Walde, was that silver coin spent in school books?

## GODSPEED AND WELCOME.

I.

Dear friend, we clasp your thin, old hand,
We cannot bear to let you part:
A silence falls upon the land,
A silence on each listening heart,
As one by one the minutes slip,
Each pregnant as a passing bell.
"Godspeed," we say, with trembling lip;
"Believe us, we have loved you well!"

Silence! we gaze a little space
On our old comrade lying there.
Let memory hold the dear dead face—
We have not many friends to spare!
We have to tread a path so dim,
To breast so vague, so wild a height,
And we have fought and wept with him!
Small wonder if we weep to-night.

II.

But hark! across the midnight skies,
With crash of bells, the child-year wakes,
And hope looks forth with joyful eyes
As the new dawn in glory breaks.
As yet we have not seen your face,
Nor what your hand may find to do,
But we have known and loved your race,
And for their sake we welcome you!

Be with us, joyful, hopeful, brave,
Child-year, that dares this winter night;
Behind us lies a new-made grave,
But all our onward path grows bright.
Where mists enshroud the valleys now,
Spread, perfect day, across the land:
We see upon the mountains' brow
The touch of an Almighty Hand!

# CHECKMATE IN TEN MOVES.

By Anna H. Drury, Author of "Gabriel's Appointment."

## I.

I HAVE played the game myself, and proved the problem, when a heavy stake depended on its issue—no less a stake than the life of a man.

Not by any means an easy task, let me tell you. It haunted me for months afterwards; and I have never cared to touch a chess-board since.

When the war first broke out between France and Germany, I was boarding at an English school for young ladies in Prussia, to perfect myself myself in the language. The expectation in England of an invasion of the German territory by Napoleon III., led to the rapid dispersion of the pupils; and I was hesitating about my own wisest plan, when I received a letter that decided me at once.

It was from a very dear English friend, the widow of a French savant, at whose pensionnat I had spent nearly a year, before my stay in my present quarters. She lived in a town that I shall only mention by the name of Trois Etoiles—and her house and garden being her sole inheritance, she utilised them by keeping a school, which in a quiet, straightforward fashion, flourished; as it deserved to do. Eleanor's pupils adored her, and rebelled when it was time to take their leave. English and French, however they might differ on every other point, united in devotion to Madame; and no one within her walls showed it more heartily than I.

We had been intimate friends in my childhood, and one of my first sorrows was the marriage which made France her home. When other and heavier griefs fell to my lot, and my own home existed no longer, it was no slight consolation to find that I might be preparing for independence under her roof. I studied French and German at Trois Etoiles, with such success as to entertain the hope of becoming permanently useful. A small remuneration would have satisfied me, if combined with the rest and solace of Eleanor's society; but to this there was one trying obstacle—the jealousy of her sister-in-law, Mariette.

Left when quite a child to her brother's care, this little enemy of mine had learned to regard his wife's love and confidence as her own peculiar right; and being one of those eager natures that seem to live in their affections, she very soon resented my claim as an older friend; and led us the sort of life that a lively, spoiled, pretty girl can lead those who are older than herself; compelling us, for the sake

of peace, to be constantly on our guard not to display a token of close friendship in her presence.

Madame loved the child both for her own sake, and for his who had left her to her charge; and it vexed her so to see Mariette's dimpled cheek flushed with passionate tears, that I endured a great deal rather than provoke them. Of course, the more we gave way to her jealousy, the more exacting it grew; and, at last, it drove me to seek another shelter. I could not always avoid a collision; my tongue sometimes got the better of my good resolves; and, hearing of this situation in North Germany, which combined several advantages, I released Mariette from my obnoxious society.

To do her justice, when she found what she had done, she was all tears of penitence, and, in the prettiest English at her command, entreated me to stay. I took her apologies in good part, but went my way all the same. And now, in the hour of my perplexity, Eleanor wrote to propose I should return.

Her reason was simple enough. The exigencies of the war had deprived the school of their cleverest professor—a young Bavarian, who taught both music and German. The situation was open, and so were her arms—Mariette sent her love, and hoped I would come.

I lost no time in proceeding to Trois Etoiles. The papers were then full of the earliest encounters between the armies, and everybody was talking about France having been first in striking a blow. Right glad was I when the heat and dust of travelling were at an end, and I was welcomed once more to my favourite quarters. How cool and bright and pleasant it all looked, and how refreshing was the good English cup of tea which Eleanor herself prepared! Mariette came forward to assist in the pouring and handing, pressing me to partake, with the assurance that the water had boiled furiously—and the tea had been sent from London.

"Grown there, too, perhaps?" suggested I, "among other evil things that are meant to ruin France?"

"Ah, no, no," she said, with a quick shake of her pretty head, "if France is to be ruined, the fault will all be her own. England's advice was good, and if it had been taken, all this need never have been."

There was a quiver in her voice that startled me, and Eleanor quietly turned the conversation. Observing Mariette attentively, I was struck with a change in more respects than one. Brook and river were just meeting when I went away; she had gone some miles between the river banks since then, and the current had grown more rapid, and the rocks more prominent. The spoiled child had become a woman of passionate feeling, and all the tenderness of those who loved her had not shielded her from suffering. And the suffering, whatever its cause, seemed, in one respect, to have softened her nature; her jealousy of me had disappeared. I enquired after old acquaintances and friends—and how the new Maire liked the toils of his office, knowing from Eleanor's letters that a friend of

her deceased husband's, and an avowed admirer of Mademoiselle Mariette, had within the year been nominated to that dignified post.

"Likes them?" repeated the young lady, with a pout, "he can never find enough to keep him employed. He was ten times happier and more useful when he had only his own business to look after, and let other people alone. Now he leaves that to his clerks, while he frets the flesh off his bones, and those of his neighbours, all for the public good! I hate the very sound of his boots at the door!"

"The boots are loyal to their allegiance, then, and still bring him within reach of those eyes he used to worship in sonnets."

"Oh, he comes often enough, if that is what you mean; but the eyes would not cry themselves blind if he stayed away," said Mariette.

"And poor Herr Ulrich—I beg his pardon, the Herr Professor Leinhardt—he was actually summoned from his classes to face musketry drill and bivouac hardships! It seems great waste of material, unless they put him in the band; and his piano touch will not be appreciated there."

"He was obliged to go," said Eleanor, and I was aware, by the very composure of her manner, that more was meant than spoken. "But he told us the military exercise was not new to him; he had gone through it all as a boy, and indeed, saw a little service in the war with Prussia."

"Ah!" I said "Prussia will not forget that, you will see. They say the Bavarians will have the compliment of being always in the front wherever there is danger."

"That is just where he wishes to be," said Mariette, her cheeks all a-glow, and her eyes flashing with a brightness that was dimmed the next moment by a gush of tears, as she darted out of the room.

I looked at Eleanor in consternation. "Yes," she said, her kind eyes filling as they met mine, "my poor little bird is caught, and I had hoped it was for her happiness, but this terrible war has changed the face of everything. They had only just come to an understanding; and Ulrich was about to go home to arrange matters with his family, when his summons came to join the army. How it will end no one can dare to say."

I was really sorry at the turn affairs had taken, and took an early opportunity of showing Mariette that my sympathy was on her side. Friends in England at this time supplied me regularly with papers, and we all devoured the reports of special correspondents with a readiness of belief proportioned to our ignorance. But time went on, and that promised victory never came.

"Wait awhile," M. le Maire would say, when he detected this impression on our countenances, "your English journalists, mademoiselle, are very clever, and write spirited articles; but they overlook

the fact that they have a Napoleon to deal with; and that such a man as the Emperor sees further than they can, and has his plans deeply laid."

M. le Maire was not only a loyal subject of the Emperor, but a zealous imitator of his policy towards Great Britain. During my previous residence at Trois Etoiles he, in the most condescending manner, had set to work to correct my views, both of English opinions and English history. Patronising before, his graciousness had increased threefold since his increase of dignity.

There were a few intimate friends, besides this great civic authority, M. Fronsac, to whom Eleanor's little drawing-room was open in the evening, and who found her English tea-table attractive enough to give them a taste for the beverage. Among these was the kind old Curé, who had known Mariette all her life, and treated her still as a pet child, bringing her chocolate bonbons in his pocket, and letting no one else hand his tea-cup. My own suspicion was that he knew all her secrets, and sympathised with her trouble.

Time went on, and history took its course, and with September came Sédan; when gloom fell on every face, and social cheerfulness was at an end. The attraction of the English newspapers still drew both the Maire and the Curé to our tea-table, but it became an effort of politeness to find topics of conversation. Something was said one evening about chess; and M. le Maire, after a little modest self-depreciation, pleaded guilty to being an intense lover of the game. His greatest trial in life had been that he so rarely found an antagonist with whom it was worth while to play. The Curé was no chess player; but very keen at backgammon, which he played with Eleanor. M. le Maire talked so long and so dictatorially upon chess, and the impossibility of anyone becoming a player who had not certain mental qualifications, that I was nettled at last into observing that I believed I could puzzle him at the game.

Indeed? He was all smiles and condescension, but might he own to a little incredulity?

As much as he thought proper; I only maintained the fact. Allow me to place the men, and at a certain stage of the game I would undertake to give him forced checkmate in ten moves.

He smiled superior, displaying the palms of his hands as he uttered the authoritative "Impossible!"

"It may be impossible to prove it, M. le Maire, as I cannot rely on my memory; but the thing has been done, and if I can recall the moves, I shall be happy to convince you."

"When your memory, richly stored as it is, will honour me so far, mademoiselle, I shall be proud to be convinced. Till then I must maintain, with profound respect, that the thing is impracticable."

The proof, as I soon found, was not so easily given. I could not trust my memory, and I had forgotten the book where the problem was to be found. Every time I saw the great functionary he had his

jocose enquiry ready : "How about the checkmate in ten moves?" And I could see he was divided between the amusement of my discomfiture, and the disappointment of real curiosity.

But one day, when I had not seen him for a whole week, being confined to my room by an indisposition, I was dreamily turning over some of my old books, and suddenly lighted on Mèry's "Floride." It flashed upon me in a moment that I had found my problem. Through several languid hours I puzzled it all out, and made it clear. Having verified my author with the help of a chessboard, I resolved to take the first opportunity of challenging M. Fronsac.

The weather was very lovely the day I went downstairs. As my friends were engaged in class, I ventured to take a saunter in the garden ; an old-fashioned pleasure ground, surrounded on three sides by capital walls for fruit, and bordered on the fourth by a little wood that skirted the town, and crept away below it. Presently I heard the old cook's voice calling to me, "Ma'amselle ! ma'amselle !"

We were always good friends, and it was with a beaming smile that she held up a small basket, containing a variety of good things for my gouter, as she called it. If I liked to have my promenade, there was the arbour, with a table and a chair, and shelter from wind and sun. And there, too, was Mère Dénise, the weeding woman, who would dust it; she herself could not stay to, as her soup required watching.

Looking round, I met the eyes of old Mother Dénise, twinkling under her large cap and kerchief with a keenness of expression I had never seen in them before. She was quite a character in her way, and a favourite of Eleanor's ; and her Alsatian way of talking had often been an amusement to us both. She was considered just now almost an historical personage, on account of the strife in her home. M. le Maire himself, when she crossed his path, would lift his hat, as he explained to me, in honour of the heroism she represented. "Well, my good friend !" I said, after we had looked at each other for a minute, "have you had any fresh news? What is it ?"

She put a finger on her lips, pointed to the provision basket, and turned away, signing me to follow. Passing to the arbour, she hurried on, glancing anxiously right and left as she went, till she reached the wood house—a hut I had never visited before.

The door was locked, but Mère Dénise had the key in her pocket, and she held it open for me to enter, securing it quickly behind us. I looked round ; there were nothing but piles of faggots and logs of wood, except old flower-pots and other waifs of gardening existence. A few rays of light made their way through an aperture in the wall, newly stuffed up with briars, and before my eyes had become accustomed to the change from the noontide brightness, I was startled to hear a voice whisper my name—whisper it with that peculiar intonation I could not mistake, though it filled me with terror.

Unconsciously I clutched the old woman's wrist, and gasped out the question, "Who is there?" At my words a figure rose from its dark corner, and two cold hands met mine.

"Best, kindest, gentlest of Englishwomen," he murmured, "with you I know I am safe, as I am with this faithful friend. You can guess why I am here—why I have braved every peril—staked my life, my honour, my freedom—for one more glance at my loved one's face before I go into the battle that may divide us for ever."

It was indeed Ulrich Leinhardt: and a tremendous risk that he had run. In the temper of the French at that time, the suspicion of being a spy was tantamount to a penal sentence; and had I not fully believed in the sincerity of his motives, I should have felt hardly justified in conniving at his entrance.

It crossed his mind, perhaps, that I doubted him; for he hastened to assure me that, as far as Trois Etoiles was concerned, he had neither eyes, ears, nor memory for anything that would do her hurt. He had won a short furlough from duty by private service to his colonel—he did not specify what—and his colonel had that trust in him, and that keen sense of honour, that he had not enquired where he meant to go, and would ask no questions when he got back. I found he had been all night in that shed, cramped for room, and with very little to eat—even his pipe denied him—for fear of discovery; and his eagerness to see his beloved Mariette could not hide the fact that he was both tired and hungry. Mère Dénise had given him a crust early in the morning, and could do no more.

Poor fellow! when I handed him my basket, and begged he would make free with its contents, the tears sprang to his eyes. He kissed my hand gratefully, and set to work with the eagerness of famine; while I was considering what to do next. His remaining there was too dangerous; the old woman shook her head when I questioned her; and observed that she had had some difficulty in keeping him hidden till then. Any moment might bring a discovery; and then—she held up her hands in a silence more emphatic than words.

He had already taken the precaution of disguising himself in a peasant's blouse and night-cap; and, with a few additions, I thought we might contrive to pass him into the house unchallenged. The old gardener's leggings, and a big basket of faggots to carry on his shoulders, were hunted out by Mère Dénise; and having grimed his face and hands, and hidden his chestnut hair under the cotton cap, it seemed to us that he might safely emerge—the more boldly the better—and walk into the house.

The basket of faggots being deposited in the back premises, he was then to take up a heavy box of books, which I had brought with me, and at which the maids had all looked askance as at an enemy. If I could get him up the back-stairs with this to the small sitting-room, which was my castle, I could lock him in, and let his friends know. To make recognition as difficult as possible, an old horse-cloth was

pulled down over his head and shoulders, as if to protect them from his burden.

Perilous as the undertaking was, it was accomplished: he reached my room in safety. I provided for his comfort as best I could, advising him to consult safety and convenience by remaining quite still; and, with the key in my pocket, went in search of Eleanor.

To my surprise I found M. le Maire paying her a morning visit; and not being disposed to face him under the circumstances, I retired unnoticed into the back drawing-room, to await his departure. The first words I heard made my heart leap with dismay.

"Yes, Madame," he was saying, in his usual deliberate and dignified style, "they say that the Prussians are sending spies in all kinds of disguises into our towns. Every house here will, in consequence, be subjected to inquisition; and all the roads and lanes, gardens, orchards, and so forth, diligently watched and patrolled. Yours, dear Madame, presents so many facilities to an enemy, that it was the first thought of; and by this time, I have no doubt, the sentries are taking up their positions. But only for a few hours. It was my duty to agree to this, and to issue the order; but this evening, Madame, with your permission, I myself shall garrison your dwelling, and be answerable for all that goes on under your roof. I could not think of you and the other ladies being exposed to the well-meant rudeness of some of our patriots. May I take the liberty of asking you to receive me this evening?"

"M. le Maire is too good," was Eleanor's reply; "he knows we are honoured by his friendship and society."

"Madame, the honour is mine; and I prove my sense of it by becoming myself your guarantee to the public. With an English lady I know I am perfectly safe; her word is her security; and if you put that loyal hand in mine, and tell me no spy is here, I shall feel confident that you are speaking the truth, and that the town has nothing to fear from any treachery of yours."

"You never suspected me of that, I hope?" said Eleanor.

"Never, Madame! And I never shall. But you see we must be impartial."

At last he went away. Then I came out of my corner, told Eleanor I had overheard, and laughed with her at the panic about Prussian spies, though we agreed it was very considerate of M. le Maire. As soon as I could I left her, observing that I was going to enlist the services of Mariette.

"I have actually got my library up-stairs at last," I said, "I caught a good man who was bringing in wood, and turned him into a porter. Mariette always promised to help me unpack the books."

"I shall be glad of anything that distracts her thoughts, poor child," said Eleanor, "she is very low-spirited this morning."

Low-spirited with Mademoiselle Mariette meant a little fractiousness of temper. She looked as unamiable about granting me this little favour, as if I had been offering her the greatest affront; and

when I got her into my bed-room, flung herself into the nearest seat with the air of exhaustion. I quietly locked the door. Mariette started to her feet.

"Take care!" I said, in a low tone, "sit down again, and I will tell you everything. But remember, if you cannot control your nerves and feelings, it is all over with us."

"What is it?" gasped the poor girl. "Have you heard of *him?*"

"Yes," I said, "I have; but unless you can be cool and steady, I will not tell you a word. A precious life depends now, under God, on our courage and presence of mind. Take a few minutes to collect your nerves, and do not speak till you are sure of yourself."

She remained motionless for a few minutes. I told her my tale, and pointed out the awkward difficulty that had just arisen. Whatever we did for Ulrich, must be done unknown to Eleanor; her honour was pledged to the Maire, and she must know nothing till all was over. My own idea was that the escape might be contrived in the evening, if we could only keep our dignified guest amused. To attempt escape by daylight, with the sentries patrolling in all directions, would be too great a risk.

"I will do my best," I said, "to throw M. le Maire off his guard for an hour. I have a resource in reserve, and I will try it. You must take care that your sister is also engaged, so that she may not detect your arrangements; and when I give you notice that it is time, you yourself must get Herr Ulrich out of the house. The guard will be raised when the Maire comes here; and then, or never, he must get away out of the town."

She clung round my neck as she had never done in her life before, and whispered that I was their guardian angel. But not a sob, or sign of a tear would she allow herself; agitation could not be afforded at such a crisis; she only begged to see him—he had risked so much for a meeting, surely I did not mean them not to meet? I certainly meant them to meet, and arming myself with hammer and chisel for the better performance of my rôle, I took her with me, as I distinctly said on the landing, "to see about unpacking those books."

Hammer and chisel did good service that day—they were heard below, and they gave me excuse for turning my back upon those two at the opposite end of the room. For Mariette's sake, I was fain to stay, when I should have preferred leaving them alone; French propriety might have been seriously offended if my presence had not been a protection against all future censoriousness. So I hammered away at the lid of my box, and tumbled the books out all over the floor, and time passed—very quickly to them, I daresay. To me it seemed as if the day would never end; and the hardest part was still to come.

At dinner-time, I sent down Mariette with an excuse, suggested by my recent illness, for my preferring to have my meal in my bed-room. I was quite tired enough to make this no subterfuge; and poor Ulrich made as short work with my dinner as he had with my luncheon. I

wondered what the servants must think of the appetite of English convalescents.

Mariette must have contrived—I did not enquire how—to give the good Curé a hint that he was wanted. When evening came, and with it M. le Maire, the kind old priest was already in the drawing-room, keeping guard over his innocent hostess.

Rash as Ulrich Leinhardt had been in venturing to Trois Etoiles at all, he had not so ignored his military training as to make no provision for retreat. Some three miles off he had a friend, a shelter, and a horse—I believe, a passport also—waiting to help him back to his regiment. What we had to do was simply to get him out of the town with a fair start; rien que ça, as Mère Dénise said; and the more we talked the matter over, the more hazy the prospect seemed to grow. The sight of a workman carrying a load out of the house at that hour would rouse a suspicion directly; and the only alternative appeared to be the old woman's favourite scheme of dressing him in her clothes —to which he showed a repugnance inconsistent with gratitude.

And nothing had been settled when we went down to meet M. le Maire. The first sight of him made me realise something of the task before me.

His dress was a stately blending of the military and official—he held some rank in the National Guard, of which he was very tenacious—and the cloak thrown over the left shoulder, the cap with gold ornaments, the braided coat, and regulation sword, combined with the amber-headed cane and municipal scarf, served to impress the beholder with his authority and power. Courteous though he was, he gave us at once to understand that this was no ordinary visit; and that we were to expect only as much of his respectful homage as duty would allow. On a slight pretext of admiring the show of fruit in the orchard, he begged leave to take a stroll round the premises, in which Eleanor accompanied him, rather amused by the excuses he made for glancing into every corner, shed, and outhouse that could possibly hold a spy. When they got back to the house, he had evidently had enough, for the present, of his heroic trappings; and put aside cloak, cap, scarf, and sword, until the time for his next round. These were all laid carefully on a chair in the hall, that they might be resumed at a moment's notice.

Mariette and I had gone out to meet them with warnings about chill and dew; and as the Maire handed his hostess back into the drawing-room, we were for a moment behind them. I looked at the chair and then at her; the same thought came into both our minds. In that dress, and in none other, might Ulrich pass unchallenged—*if only he could put it on.*

To make matters as difficult as possible, the Maire begged us to allow the door of the salon to be kept open, so that nothing could pass in the hall without his knowledge. His request was, of course, a command; but I saw Mariette bite her pretty lip with vexation, and was afraid he saw it also.

I observed to him that he had been very much in my thoughts lately: which was graciously received, with a hope that I had utilised my retirement by resolving that chess problem. Exactly so; it was to that I alluded; and if M. le Maire could find leisure, I should have pleasure in at least amusing him, if I failed to convince.

So, after a few passing compliments and a little amicable fencing, he sat down to the board, which he ostentatiously arranged in full view of the open door. I sat with my back to the hall and a mirror before me, in which I could see, (it being well lighted with candles) almost as clearly as the Lady of Shalott. I noticed that the Curé seemed restless, and disinclined to do anything but watch our proceedings, so Madame took out her work, with a happy unconsciousness, I could not help envying: and Mariette pretended to be engrossed in threading some beads.

"I propose, M. le Maire," I said, as I arranged my pieces, "to go through the first part of the game, as played by Labourdonnais and some other famous champion; so that you will be able to study the position, before entering on the problem."

"You still maintain that an opposition player on his guard could not prevent mate in ten moves, mademoiselle?"

"I mean to give it a fair trial this evening; when I give you notice, then do your worst. I hold the white, and, being challenged, have the first move.

| *White.* | *Black.* |
|---|---|
| 1. Q.'s P. 2 sq. | Q.'s P. 2 sq. |
| 2. Q. B. P. 2 sq. | Q. P. takes P. |

"Aha!" said M. le Curé, taking snuff, "we should have called that a gambit in my young days."

A short discussion followed here on the nature of gambits, and the supposed derivation of the word from the Spanish; just long enough to make Mariette spill half her beads, and then be driven nearly desperate by the Maire's attemps to pick them up again. Meanwhile, I refreshed my memory with my notes, and at last went on more smoothly.

| *White.* | *Black.* |
|---|---|
| 3. K. P. 1 sq. | K. P. 2 sq. |
| 4. K. B. 3 sq. takes P. | K. P. takes Q. P. |
| 5. K. P. takes P. | K. Kt. 2 sq. before B. |
| 6. Q. Kt. 2 sq. before B. sq. | K. B. sq. before K. |
| 7. K. Kt. 2 sq. before B. sq. | K. castles. |
| 8. Q. B. 2nd sq. before K. | Q. B. P. 1 sq. |
| 9. K. R. P. 1 sq. | Q. Kt. 1 sq. before Q. |
| 10. K. B. retreats to 3rd sq. before Q. Kt.'s sq. | Q. Kt. to his 3rd sq. |
| 11. K. castles. | K. Kt. to 4th sq. before Q. |
| 12. Q. R. P. 2 sq. | Q. R. P. 2 sq. |
| 13. K. Kt. to sq. before K. sq. | Q. B. to 3rd sq. before K.'s sq. |
| 14. K. B. to sq. before Q. B.'s sq. | K. B. B. 2 sq. |
| 15. Q. to sq. before K. sq, | K. B. P. 1 sq. |
| 16. Q. B. retreats 1 sq. | Q. to royal sq. |
| 17. Q. R. to royal sq. | Q. B. retreats 1 sq. to before R. |

"Observe, M. le Maire," I said, "that up to this point no pieces have fallen but the four pawns. My author tells me that White, after the last move, bent down over the board and suddenly looked up again, with his eyes so full of mischief that everybody was sure something was coming."

"It is a fine position for both parties," said the Maire, whose interest had been deepening with every move; "still, I cannot ——"

"Wait for two steps further."

| *White.* | *Black.* |
|---|---|
| 18. Q. to 4th sq. before royal sq. | K. Kt. P. 1 sq. |
| 19. Q. B. takes K. B. P. | Kt. takes B. |

"At this point, we are told, White stifled a laugh, leaned his elbows on the table, and coolly observed, "Nine moves more, and then checkmate!"

There was silence; my own excitement had by this time brought on such burning thirst that I was glad of a respite. M. le Curé shut up his snuff-box with a snap, declaring that he should not sleep if he looked on any more. Would Madame favour him with a quiet game at something more suitable to an old man's wits?

Eleanor complied at once, and they were soon safely ensconced in a corner where she, at least, could see nothing; and I turned to ask Mariette if she would make me a glass of lemonade? She rose with most amiable alacrity, and disappeared, unmarked by M. le Maire, whose eyes were fixed on the position before him.

"Well, M. le Maire," I said at last; "shall I proceed?"

"Mademoiselle, it will be a favour. My brain reels with the amount of calculation required."

"Then here is the first move."

*White.*

20. Q. takes Kt.

"One moment, Mademoiselle!" he said, eagerly; "I think I see something that might help the defence."

I asked nothing better than to see him thoroughly lost in his fascinating study; and waited in silence till he looked up at me, with a gleam of triumph. "*I* should do this, in Black's place."

B. to 4th of W. Q.'s B., giving check to Q. and R.

"Just so," I returned, "and when that move was made, White's opponents were exulting at his expense, while he only looked grimly good-humoured."

At this moment I heard the key turn in the sitting-room up stairs.

"You will see how he must have foreseen, and prepared for it, by the *second* move."

21. Q. to 3rd sq. before B. K. R.'s sq. B. takes R.

"Of course," said the Maire. "Allow me to think the matter over a little."

There was another silent pause; my throat and lips were parching, but I durst not mention the lemonade, lest Eleanor should go and fetch it. I watched the features of my opponent, and if I had ever doubted the engrossing power of chess calculation, his rapt stillness would have convinced me. A slight sound on the stairs decided me to take the next step, and play the *third* move.

22. B. takes K. Kt. P.

"Good!" said he; and played the counter move with a smile.

R. P. takes B.

"You think that will stop it?" I asked.

"Let us see."

The room might have rocked with an earthquake—I doubt if the chief magistrate would have noticed, unless it had shaken the pieces. But in the mirror opposite I saw what was hidden from his entranced eyes; a figure lifting his cloak and other equipments from the chair in the hall. I played my *fourth* rather in a hurry.

23. Kt. takes P. Kt. to his B.'s sq.

"Can you suggest a better move, M. le Maire?"

He only shook his head; he was becoming too impatient for criticism—he really wanted now to see the end. I moved with more deliberation in consequence, keeping his eyes rivetted on my hand. Two figures passed before the mirror; one might have been the Maire himself; the other was Mère Dénise. I played my *fifth* move, as Mariette reappeared, and leaned on the back of my chair.

24. Q. checks, from Black's R's sq. K. before his R.

"A forced move, M. le Maire will admit. Well, chère amie, and my lemonade?"

"Do you mean to say that Toinette did not bring it in, after all my pains in making it? You shall have it directly."

And out she flew, leaving the door behind her ajar; of course, by accident. I admired her presence of mind, but I felt as if I should break down, unless I could moisten my throat. M. le Maire made a gloomy sign for me to continue; he was getting a little sulky with failure.

I played the *sixth* move.

25. Q. retires one sq. and checks. K. had but one move.

And then, as I heard a dog bark, hurried on to the *seventh.*

26. Kt. 2 sq. before Black K.

"Now, M. le Maire, you must consider what there is to suggest. Your chances have dwindled low."

This seemed to nettle him, and he remained thoughtful for so long that Mariette had time to return with my lemonade. Never was any draught more delicious! I durst not meet her eyes, but it gave me

just the stimulus I wanted, and I was ready for my adversary's exultant exclamation.

B. checks Q. from her 3rd sq.

"The game is not lost yet, mademoiselle."

"All is lost but honour, M. le Maire."

I played the *eighth* move.

R. clears 5 sq. and checks.

"Ah, par exemple!"

He was utterly confounded now, and admitted that he had but one move.

I followed with the *ninth.*

28. Q. retreats 1 sq. and checks. K. to his B.'s 4th sq,

"And now, M. le Maire, for the finishing stroke, foreseen through all these eighteen changes."

29. K. Kt. P. 2 sq. and Mate.

The clock struck ten, but the Maire seemed to hear nothing.

I had not over-estimated the effect produced by the gradual development of this remarkable performance. It absorbed his mind to that extent that he could think of nothing else. Not that he was convinced—far from it; he was positive there might be ways of averting the stroke, if taken in time; and as I readily yielded up my notes, he went back over the whole game, stimulated thereto by the lively interest displayed by Mariette, who professed she had never cared about chess before. If anyone could find out the missing clue, it would be M. le Maire, no doubt; and she drew in her chair, and watched him ponder and puzzle, and asked questions, which from any one else he would have thought intrusive, but from her lips could only charm.

M. le Curé left his backgammon, and came to look at the problem, and, perhaps, to take the conversation into his own hands; for Mariette's prattle subsided soon after that.

The two gentlemen held much discussion over Labourdonnais and his game, which would take too long to relate, even if I could remember it; but of the conclusion of that memorable evening I have rather a hazy record, being thoroughly tired out. I only know that when the striking of the church clock at length roused M. le Maire both to a sense of his duty and to the flight of time, he had only to open the door of the salon, and there was his equipment, civil and military, just where he had left it some hours before, as if that image on the mirror had never been!

Alice's adventures through the Looking-Glass were smooth-sailing compared with my chess dreams that night, and I have had a dread of the game ever since. Eleanor found me so feverish in the morn-

ing, that I was ordered to keep my room; and it was not till late in the day that Mariette was allowed to enter.

The town was full of strange reports, she whispered, and neighbours had been running in and out with stories all the morning, each one more important than the other. The real facts, as far as she gathered them, were these. Two citizens of Trois Etoiles, returning home the evening before, had suddenly encountered M. le Maire, in full dress, emerging from the wood. They had made an attempt to address him, so as to explain why they were so late; but he had waved his cane in so authoritative a manner, that they could only take the hint, and let him go by.

Curiosity, which they accounted for by their natural concern for his safety, made them watch him as he marched down the next field, and they could see him, on approaching a hedge, make a sudden dart through, as if to seize something hiding behind it. The dusk made it difficult to be certain, but they both agreed that they made out at least one figure on horseback galloping away in the distance; there might have been more—probably half a dozen. Of course, but for his own orders, they would have gone on cheerfully to see if he wanted help, but all the world knew that M. le Maire would forgive no one for interfering with his deep-laid plans; and they made the best of their way at once into the town.

Another story was flying about, bearing on the same mystery. Old Madame Perrin (the greatest scold in Trois Etoiles) had a famous goat, more precious to her soul than all her relations put together. This treasure had disappeared the day before, and the small granddaughter, whose only use in the world (as everybody knew) was to look after poor Loulou, was sent into the wood, well chastised, to hunt for her, under pain of worse penalty. The little girl, crying and frightened at being alone when it was getting dark, was suddenly confronted by a somebody in a cloak and cap, who told her to dry her eyes, and go home to her grandmother, and she would find her goat tied to a tree at the end of the path—which proved to be the case. And Madame Perrin, having scolded the child well for telling such a story, could not help telling it again in the morning to all she knew, and the tale of the two valiant citizens came just in time to make the whole thing clear.

While they had been quietly unconscious, busy about their ordinary duties, the Maire, like a true French magistrate, had been watching over the whole town, defeating the plots of the Prussians, arresting (or very nearly) ever so many mounted spies, and winning back, single-handed, all the plunder they had meant to drive away —— even to the poor goat. In a very short time the two stories had assumed such a character that the press (duly represented in Trois Etoiles by a daily sheet of advertisements), took it up with enthusiasm, and published an account that caused a run upon the office. Four editions of the paper were sold as fast as the printers could

work it off, and the subject being so profitable the editor's pen was actively employed in preparation for the next day's demand.

Poor M. le Maire ! From all we heard—for he did not come near us till the excitement was over—he made several attempts to disabuse the world of its error, and rid himself of the honours heaped on his reluctant head. But he soon found he should only make himself unpopular by convincing people against their will, and was fain to be a hero, where his conscience told him he had been only a sentinel off his guard.

An unexpected change in my fortunes, with which my story has no concern, took me back to England, and it was on the eve of my marriage, nearly three years after the events I have been relating, that I received a box from Bavaria, containing the most exquisitely carved set of wooden chessmen I had ever seen. Each piece was a study. I had never met with any Eastern ivory work to compare with this in finish and grace.

A letter followed the gift, explaining that it was the work of Ulrich Leinhardt, a faint token of the gratitude never dormant in his soul; and imploring as the greatest possible favour to the writer—his no less grateful wife——that if we visited the Continent on our wedding tour, we would spare a little time to them in their Bavarian home. Ulrich's campaign had ended in honour and safety, and he had inherited the family property, to which he had some months earlier carried his beloved Mariette. Their happiness—my work—had only one drawback: they could not recollect the problem that had been their deliverance, and it would be the crowning joy of their lives to see me and mine in their home, and realise for once the scene in which they had played so perilous a part.

We could not gratify them at that time; but it has been a standing promise ever since, that our first Bavarian tour should include the Algau, and make us Mariette's guests.

I do not think my husband quite believes in the problem, but Eleanor (who gave up her school after Mariette's marriage, and settled in our neighbourhood) assures us that M. le Maire still pronounces it the wonder of the world; and consoles himself for much by maintaining that only a Frenchman's intellect could calculate beforehand, from a given point of the game, a Checkmate in Ten Moves.

THE ARGOSY.

*FEBRUARY*, 1882.

# MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

## CHAPTER V.

### IN THE TEMPLE.

THE brightness of the long summer twilight was still lingering when Frank Raven alighted from his cab, under the trees of King's Bench Walk, in the Temple. He paid the driver, and then, guided by the names on the doorposts, and carrying his little valise in his own hand, he mounted to the topmost storey of one of the dingy mansions.

There he found a door bearing the name of Mr. Philip Connell. It stood half open, with a bundle of washing blocking it up, and Frank's rap met with no more ceremony than an invitation to "come in" from his cousin's own voice, while an elderly woman came forward and pushed the bundle aside, begging pardon for its appearance.

Frank advanced into the chamber. Philip Connell was seated, cigar in mouth, in a low lounging chair. There were coffee cups and scraps of toast among the newspapers and books on the table beside him. When he recognised his guest, he sprang up in astonishment.

"Frank, old boy, so glad to see you! But really I did not expect you till to-morrow, so you must excuse all shortcomings. It's a mercy Mrs. Biggs is here at this hour. Here! Mrs. Biggs!" he called in a loud voice, and it brought in the woman. "Will you kindly get a cup of tea and a cottage loaf; and get two nice mutton chops. At once, please. This is a visitor from a long journey."

Then he added, aside to Frank, as she moved away to obey his orders, "I always excuse any extra job to the old lady. It sweetens her temper, and I find does no harm to the viands."

Philip rattled away with his pleasant common-places. Presently, meeting little response, it struck him that his visitor was sad and

absent; and remembering that new grave at Ravenstoke, the young barrister kindly turned his light tongue to a graver tune.

"You can't think how welcome you are, Frank," he said; "all the more so that I did not hope my letter would meet with so prompt a response—even if it got a favourable answer at all. We were often talking about you when I was lately at home in Coltburn, Frank. My mother thought it strange there should be sickness in our house and at Ravenscourt at the same time. And how are my aunt and Leonard?"

"Quite well, thank you," Frank replied. "I had made up my mind to come to London before I got your invitation, Philip," he added with some effort.

"Indeed?" said young Connell, his eyes widening. "To see me?"

"I—I don't know," answered candid Frank.

Philip Connell got an inkling that something had gone wrong, and with a ready and intelligent sympathy, for which everybody might not have credited that random youth, he pressed matters no further then, but set himself zealously to the performance of his part as host, talking about anything and everything: last night's debate, the new novel, or the fresh play. Frank Raven listened and replied like a man in a dream. At length, tea over, the two lit their cigars, and drew their chairs to the window, set wide open in the sultry dusk.

Frank felt like an impostor. He could not bear that Philip should continue to regard him as the well-provided son of Ravenstoke when he had begun to feel himself but a vague adventurer. With flushing cheek, Frank sat leaning forward, chin in hand and elbow on knee, gazing at the moon. Philip leaned back; stealing, from time to time, an observant glance at his cousin.

"Did you see my father's will in the paper, Phil?" Frank asked in a low voice.

"Well, I did," said Philip. "I saw it one day when there was a press of news, so that it was very prettily curtailed."

"I daresay my name was not mentioned at all," Frank went on, with nervous resolution, "for I come in for nothing at all now."

"That I call a downright shame!" exclaimed Philip.

"Leonard has the estate, of course. And my mother has all the money for her life-time, and I am to come in afterwards."

"Well, well," said Philip, shaking out his meerschaum and refilling it, "that's a queer arrangement. But, of course, she'll do handsomely by you. She couldn't do less."

"Of course she would," Frank eagerly assented. "But I've made a fool of myself. I can't deny that it did seem rather hard, but my father had every right to do what he would with his own. Only I'd been brought up to like a life that one can't live upon nothing: and —and I don't know what I'm fit for. A fellow cannot get a living by sitting well in the saddle, or by being a crack cricketer—not if he's a gentleman!"

"What on earth are you talking about?" interrupted Philip. "How did you make a fool of yourself? As to its being rather hard, it is confoundedly hard. And I'd have said so, downright, myself"—and the young barrister smoked emphatically. "But as for your having to get a living, it must be mere stuff and nonsense!"

"It might have been better, if I had spoken out at once, too," said Frank, meekly. "Instead of that, I kept it rankling within me. And when Leonard began to speak of my future course—quite naturally and properly, and it was very kind of him—then I felt it as if he were giving me a stab; and I flew into a rage, and out came my bitterness. All at the wrong time, and under the wrong circumstances."

"And then?" prompted Philip, for Frank paused.

"And then the end of it is," said poor Frank, desperately, "I feel I must begin to depend on my own resources. And I don't know what they are! If I did, I should not mind anything else," he added, thinking of that lonely little governess, and the brave face she turned on her self-dependent life.

Long and long the cousins talked, drawn up side by side at the narrow window, within hearing of the hum of mighty London, and miles and miles away from quiet Ravenscourt, with the birds' nests in the old oaks standing round it.

When Philip had heard the whole history, he acknowledged that it was quite natural in Frank to have made that rash resolution, not to be obliged to them for money; he might have made it himself, but then he was sure he should have intended to keep it in the spirit rather than the letter. He felt certain that Mrs. Raven would never permit such a course: he knew what mothers were. Frank might make believe to take his own way, if he liked; he would have to give it up in the end, to save her from breaking her heart.

And then Frank felt that though he had striven hard to tell his story truly, yet something had escaped in the telling. And he was glad of it. The heart knows its own bitterness, and is well satisfied to hide it.

Philip kept up his argument. "Would Frank have held to his word, had he vowed to burn down Ravenscourt, church, vicarage, and village?"

"No," said Frank, turning upon him brightly. "It is to one's honour to repent of ways that must injure others. But when we think we see what is right to do, we have no right to draw back because we find how hard it is."

"Yours—what I gather of them—are fine ideas," said Philip Connell, thoughtfully. "The worst of it is, that it takes money to keep them up. They suited you at Ravenscourt, no doubt. But if you carry them into any profession, I don't know how you'll get on. If one has to make one's way in the world, one must walk through a little dirt, and never mind the splashes!"

"That isn't honour!" cried poor Frank.

"I suppose I have no right to know what honour is," said Mr. Connell, good-humouredly. "You county families hold the monopoly, while my genealogy goes no further than a grandfather who made his money in a cotton mill. (I only wish he had made a little more!) You know the female grafts don't count for much in a family tree, Frank, but I suppose it is some of my mother's blood in my veins, which makes me feel you are a good bit in the right. I would help you, my boy, if I could."

"I can't believe the world is all sham and humbug," said Frank warmly. "I can't believe there isn't anybody in it who sticks to his principles."

"There are some who do. But we barristers have to—upon my word, I think the best I can do for you, is to introduce you to my old friend Gertrude Agate," broke off Philip. "I can't see how she can help you, but she may. And now I'll just go and look at your bed-room, and see if Mrs. Biggs has made everything satisfactory. I know the Ravens go to bed early, but I hope I shan't disturb you if I sit up here a little longer. That is one of my bad London habits."

Philip Connell took his cousin to his chamber, and with one or two closings of open drawers and slight disposings of toilet knick-knacks, he left Frank to his repose; Frank quite innocent that his host himself had no better resting-place than a dark closet, furnished with an old ottoman, a blanket, and a railway rug. Philip had intended to fit it up slightly as a temporary dormitory for himself, should his cousin accept his invitation. Perhaps a hope had floated through Philip's mind hazily that he might recruit his own shattered finances by some modest loan from the young cousin of better fortune. He was very poor; but he did not despond more than he had desponded yesterday; no, nor so much. He was one of those queer people whose spirits rise as their fortunes sink, who are quite convinced that when one door shuts, another opens, and who find a pleasurable excitement in wondering what it will be. It is a cheery nature which makes hardship and anxiety into a kind of cheerful game of chance—lose to-day, win to-morrow.

Without one grudging remembrance of the hours he had lost with Frank, Philip Connell sat down, a wet towel round his head, to write a review of a book he had not read, but which must be well praised in next day's *Evening Coach.*

Frank Raven slept heavily, but woke early, roused by his cousin rising from his finished midnight task, and wearily creeping away to the closet and the ottoman. The London daylight came grey and sluggish through the dingy brown curtains. How bright and fresh the light would break over the birds' nests in the oaks by Ravenscourt! "O father, father, why did you go away, and make it all so hard? O mother, mother, if your boy could only feel in his heart of hearts that you yearn towards him, as you wake in your lonely bed!"

An old judge's faded portrait looked down from the wall, and held its peace. Hot tears might fall on the clean pillows. If they did, who should know?

In the morning, when Frank opened his portmanteau, he lifted out the newspaper which Charity Hale had spread over his clothes, and something in it caught his eye. It was only a line printed in capital letters, at the top of that column wherein New Forest farmers announced their withdrawal from responsibility for their wives' debts, or New Forest lovers telegraphed to each other in very simple cipher. But this line only set forth a date—

"THE 4TH OF SEPTEMBER, 1835."

It was the date of Frank's own birthday.

"I wonder what that means?" he pondered. "It was the time when one unlucky fellow came into the world. I hope it means better fortune of some sort for somebody. Anyway, it can't concern me."

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FRONT PARLOUR AND THE BACK.

FRANK RAVEN had to get through his first day in London as best he might. Philip Connell had to be out, and could do no more for his cousin than make him free of his books and his cigar case. He began to wonder whom Philip meant to take him to see. He had heard nothing beyond her name—Gertrude Agate. Philip had not recurred to the subject: probably he had forgotten his own suggestion.

Mr. Connell came in, breathlessly apologising for having been detained so long, and they got through their dinner.

"Come along now, Frank!" said Philip, "we will go off and see Miss Agate. I hope you won't be frightened at her. Not that she is at all frightful, only she is a very different style of person, and surrounded by a very different order of things, from what you have been accustomed to. I shan't tell you anything beforehand. Life has not so many sensations that I can afford to miss the sight of your bewilderment."

They had a long walk. It ended in that purlieu of poor streets which lies between Oxford Street and the New Road. Some of these streets had had, in their day, no mean pretensions to gentility, but they were now poor, and full of struggles for bare existence. Still, it was streets such as these which had always captivated Frank's imagination during his brief London experiences in days gone by. The very faces he met in these places, swiftly passing by, had suggested to him endless possibilities of romance and tragedy. And

he had implicit faith in the cloaked foreigners who stalk in corners. Even when they were Frenchmen—the refugee republicans of those days—Frank was more sympathetic than might have been expected from his Conservative breeding. But the Tories who had led his politics were of the sound, old-fashioned sort, who can forgive a Frenchman anything except contentment with his country or himself.

They turned into one of the quieter streets, where the traces of decay and poverty were at least decorous. Philip paused before a door in no way differing from all the doors around. Its handle and knocker might be a little brighter, but its paint was as poor and worn, and there was the regulation display of bells on its post. Philip pulled the lowest of them.

The door was opened by a little faded woman servant, hardly of middle age, with a scared expression of face. It brightened into a pale smile when she recognised Mr. Connell.

"Ha, Davies," said that gentleman, cheerily. "How are you? And is Miss Agate at home and disengaged?"

Evidently his voice was already heard within, for from the parlour came words in a clear, ringing tone, inviting him to enter.

Philip advanced with all his graceful self-possession. "I will not apologise for bringing my cousin to see you without express permission, Miss Agate," he said, "for you are the only person I know who can never be taken by surprise."

"Come in, certainly," answered the ringing voice. "My tea is just ready. And here are my cups and saucers."

"Miss Agate, allow me to introduce my cousin, Frank Raven, from Ravenstoke," said Philip, when they were fairly in the room.

A slight, upright figure rose to welcome them. That was all Frank could see at first, for the figure stood against the light, and it was already so late in the gloaming that the room was quite shadowy. Frank bowed, but the lady held out her hand.

"You are Mr. Connell's cousin," she said, "and therefore, I think we may shake hands. And will you sit down on that chair with the green cushion; and do you take milk and sugar in your tea? Mr. Connell takes only milk, and therefore I shall serve him first, or I shall be sure to forget his whims."

The words of the welcome might be homely, but there could be no mistake that she who uttered them was a lady, youngish yet. And when the faded little serving woman brought in a lamp, and Frank could clearly see his hostess's face, it did not belie her tone and manner. Frank was no connoisseur in female loveliness: only he knew the faces he liked. He had liked the face of that little lonely governess in the Ravenstoke lanes. And he liked this one.

It was a curiously straight face. The line of brow and chin was strictly even; all the angles of the countenance were right angles. Its contour was a little worn, and it was almost colourless; but the

complexion had a clearness and transparency which suggested perfect, if finely poised, health.

"And where is Miss Evelyn to-night?" asked Philip.

"She has gone to a little evening party," answered Miss Agate. "I am glad of it. I often fear Evelyn finds her life dull."

"I can't believe in anybody being dull with you," said Philip.

"Can't you?" she replied, with a laughing shake of the head. "You should hear Evelyn's side of that matter. Though she does not complain so much of me as of Mary Davies. And I do own Mary Davies *is* depressing. She would like to be always near Evelyn, shielding her from possible harm: when one has brought a child up, you see, one gets overfond of it."

"Which Evelyn naturally resents," observed Philip.

"Certainly," said Miss Agate. "But, as I say to Evelyn, why be cross with the poor, patient, faithful woman: as life goes on, one begins to find one is not troubled with too much love! Young people do not realise this. And Evelyn has been a little excited to-day. So have I, for that matter. And I daresay, if I tell you about it, you will laugh at us both for our pains."

"Then tell me, by all means," said Philip. "Never deny a laugh to a fellow creature."

"It is something I can show you," remarked Miss Agate. Turning to her desk, she lifted up a printed paper, carefully folded, and handed it to Philip, pointing with her finger to a special paragraph.

It was the advertisement sheet of a London newspaper issued that morning. Philip Connell read:

"The 4th of September, 1835. Apply to Messrs. Dewe and Creed, Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn."

"Why! that was in our Hampshire paper of yesterday!" interposed Frank, in his surprise. "At least, the date was: I don't think there was any address. I noticed it because it happened to be the date of my birth."

Miss Agate was looking intently at Philip Connell. "That is Evelyn's birthday, you know," she said, in a low voice.

"Is it?" said Philip, as if he did not feel pledged to remember every interesting fact about this girl. But he returned Miss Agate's gaze.

"And now your cousin says it was in the Hampshire paper, too," pleaded Miss Agate. "Don't you remember what I told you about the paper in the baby's pocket?"

Philip appeared to be thinking.

"Could I make some inquiry?" she resumed in an undertone.

"You ought not to do so," said Philip, quickly. "I might. But it may be like looking for a particular pebble on a shingly shore."

"I know that," she assented. "Yet it seems a chance. And I cannot bear to let one go by, for Evelyn's sake."

"She can never find a better friend than you, or a kinder home than this," spoke Philip emphatically.

"She might easily find a brighter and a richer one," returned Miss Agate in a gentle tone. "I think we ought to do something about this, Mr. Connell?"

"I could go to Dewe and Creed, and pump them," Philip answered. "Bless me," he went on, as she began to thank him, "it is all in my line. Legal investigation—experience of life, and all that, you know; and what is more, it is good fun."

Miss Agate did not seem inclined to dwell on the subject. She turned to her desk again, brought forward a magazine, and, apologising to Frank for introducing professional business, straightway began to discuss some subject of mutual interest with Philip.

Frank caught the names of divers newspapers and periodicals, and such phrases, strange to him, as "proof" and "copy." He was glad to sip his tea and glance round the room. There certainly was not such a pretty room in Ravenscourt. The walls were studded with pictures, many of them fine engravings or photographs from great masterpieces. Hanging shelves were there, draped with red and set out with china, and it never struck Frank's innocent masculine mind as at all out of the common, when he noticed that this decorative pottery was exactly similar to that in use on the tea-table. Each chair was different from the other; different as their occupants could be: for they were of ebony and cane, and oak, and red and grey chintz, and stiff mahogany and pleasantly faded tent stitch. There were books everywhere! Books in book-cases, books piled on little tables, books on sets of tiny shelves fitted up beside the fireplace.

Frank's attention was suddenly recalled to his hostess by her exclaiming, her clear voice full of passionate intensity—

"Oh, if I could only find somebody who really believes in goodness and truth!"

"What could they have been talking about?" wondered the startled Frank. "And who did not believe in truth and goodness? One might have lived through a whole generation at Ravenstoke, and never heard such a cry of yearning."

Philip laughed. It was not a mocking laugh. Perhaps there was a little pain in it. But he only said, in his usual bantering way—

"If you talk to yourself when nobody is here, Miss Agate, as you have been talking to me, it is a great and grievous waste. Never say a word for nothing, which you could get well paid for writing down."

"I don't believe that even our unspoken thoughts are wasted," returned Miss Agate, though she drew a long breath before she answered. "I was thinking when I spoke of God's marvellous goodness, His wonderful loving kindness to all His earthly flock; and I do not believe there is one of us—no, not one, Mr. Connell—who adequately realizes it, or can feel it as it deserves to be felt."

"Well, well," said Philip Connell, "we must each do the best we can, according to our lights, and though mine are dark enough, I might be better than I am, I freely admit. But I've brought you somebody after your own heart; somebody who is dreadfully in earnest, Miss Agate. This cousin of mine has made up his mind that it is his duty to make his own way in the world, and he is determined to do nothing but what he thinks is right. Where do you think that will end?"

"At the workhouse-door, possibly," said Miss Agate, quite cheerily, "but not probably. If you look in a beggar's face you will be generally able to remark, 'My friend, judging from your looks, I am thankful to see it is not your virtues which have brought you to this pass.'"

"And as a beginning," said Philip, disregarding the interpolation, "this young man has quarrelled with his own family, and I may say with his own bread-and-butter and jam."

"We have not quarrelled," put in Frank, stoutly. "But we shall do better apart just now. They feel they could not help me without really hindering me. At least, I feel that. I am sure it is true. It is quite right. It is best."

"I understand," said Miss Agate, kindly. But she said no more for a minute. And Frank's youthful pride took fire at the idea that some sort of silent appeal was made to her on his behalf.

"I shall do very well indeed," he said valiantly, with his heart sinking like lead within him. "A man can always help himself. Even his bodily strength counts for something. I can go to the backwoods and fell timber."

"Why need you go to the backwoods to do that?" asked the lady. "If you think your work lies in that line, why not do it here? A man can make his way as well in England as in the colonies, if he will do here what he would have to do there."

"But he can't," stammered Frank, "because"—he was going to add, "he would be ashamed," but before the words were uttered it seemed as if Miss Agate's eyes showed him the depth of their meanness and cowardice.

"Why not?" she asked, brightly. "A gentleman working among working men would be doing more towards the real progress of his race than a thousand elevating institutions. Remember, I say a gentleman. I don't mean a rich man whose bad habits have made him poor, and who degrades the honest class beneath him by taking refuge in it. Every year some poor man sets himself to grow rich because he appreciates luxury and power. Why should not gentlemen, who value simplicity and freedom from care, take up a workman's life?"

"But would it be doing the best we can with our talents?" asked Philip. "I thought you were always so strong on that point."

"Do men always go into professions to serve the professions? or because sometimes they think the professions may serve them?" asked Miss Agate.

"Oh dear," said Philip, ruefully, "now I'm in for it. Is the law any better for my services? Oh dear no. Am I very much better off for belonging to the law? Oh dear no. But I live in hope, which springs eternal in the human breast."

"If I were younger," said Frank, hardly knowing what to make of either of them, "I should like to be an engineer."

"Ah, yes; and that might have suited admirably," admitted Philip. "Suppose you advertise as one, and get somebody else to do the work?"

"I hate advertisements," remarked Miss Agate, "they minister to the prevailing sins of self-announcement and self-praise."

"Can't get on without advertisements," said Philip. "We all advertise in our own way. The eye of the public must be caught."

"Catch it, then, by saying that one sells tea," said Miss Agate, "but leave others to find out that it is the best and the cheapest of teas. You are better than your own words, Mr. Connell."

"No, I'm not," Philip answered. "I know I don't go to all the philanthropic dinners, and defend—free, gratis, for nothing—all belligerent missionaries and charity-wardens. Young Rush does that, on my stair. But I don't abstain from principle, only because I can't be bothered. Don't think me better than I am!" he persisted, with half ludicrous pathos.

Miss Agate had not seemed to heed his later sentences. She had sat silently, and whenever she sat so, there came upon her face a curious, listening expression. Frank had noticed it more than once during the evening: he had even caught the infection, and listened too, and wondered what he expected to hear. The house was not profoundly quiet. Overhead, doors opened and shut, and voices were heard: but people do not listen for these ordinary sounds.

Frank had not sat long in that front parlour, before he had become aware that the back room, divided from it by folding doors, had an occupant of its own. He had heard a foot move to and fro—a heavy, slow foot, softly shod; a chair was drawn, and then came a sound, as if a large volume was suddenly closed. It was the last of these sounds which brought that listening expression to Gertrude Agate's face. Just as Philip finished speaking, there was again a sound of a closing book, and then a musically toned bell gave a tiny tinkle.

Miss Agate rose to her feet. Her guests rose, too; they were evidently dismissed.

She held out her hand to Frank, and her kind, eager eyes were fixed on him as she said:

"Do not fear life. Fear nothing but to do wrong. Never mind seeming to fail; when bubbles burst, they fall like dew. To do our best keeps us always busy; and then we can't be unhappy very long."

"We will come again, very soon, Miss Agate: as soon as I've seen these lawyers," said Philip. "And I'll bring Frank Raven with me."

The bell tinkled again. Miss Agate was already fingering a key

which hung from her girdle. And then Frank noticed that across the folding doors leading to that back room was swung a bar with a lock in it. Nobody could enter that apartment hastily or unawares.

"Poor lady!" began Philip, when they were once more in the street, "there's a terrible story in that back room. She has never related it to me; I've gathered it up here and there. I'll not tell you about it—at any rate, not now. She can tell it to you herself if she wishes you to know: and I shouldn't be surprised if she does tell you, for I know Gertrude Agate, and if ever she took to a new face, she took to yours. She's a genius and a good woman, Frank—just a little cracked, perhaps—but through a crack, my boy, we may see a star, which does not shine in at the front door."

"I scarcely thought her cracked," said simple Frank. "All she said seemed so reasonable that I felt as if I ought to think with her. Only I fancy I had never thought at all about most of the subjects."

"Maybe she is extra wise," answered Philip; with a queer laugh. "But that comes to the same thing. Cracked china and crackle china look very much alike, only the one is but too common, and the other is invaluable!"

## CHAPTER VII.

### GREEK MEETS GREEK.

"I SUPPOSE I must go to these men, Dewe and Creed," remarked Philip Connell, as he sat lazily sipping his coffee next morning.

"You mean about the mysterious advertisement," rejoined Frank.

"Yes. If the errand was not for Miss Agate, I should say it was a fool's mission; but she is the queerest woman I know for hitting on a right nail! I tell her she would have been burned in the witch days."

"What is the particular nail to be hit in the present case—if I may ask?" said Frank. "I did not understand it last night."

"It is the mystery of Evelyn," Philip answered, melodramatically.

Frank laughed. "I like mysteries. To begin with, who is Evelyn?"

"Evelyn is just Evelyn," said Philip. "She is very much just Evelyn and nothing else, though she is commonly called Evelyn Agate."

Frank looked puzzled. "Who is she, then?"

"That is what she does not know herself, and is particularly anxious to get explained," said Philip. "Neither do I know very much about her personally; except that she is what would be considered pretty by most people—including herself."

"Do explain, Philip!"

"Well, there is a mystery about the young lady's birth and parentage. I can never see how it can connect her with Miss Agate's own family tragedy: still I should think they are connected."

"The more you say, the more I am mystified, old fellow."

"You need not be," returned Philip. "You are quite welcome to know of Miss Evelyn what I know, Frank, and what she knows herself. She was left one evening at Miss Agate's door, without any clue to her identity."

"What a strange thing!"

"Hearing some prolonged noise outside, like a baby cooing, Miss Agate went to open the door, followed by her young servant—she was young then: twenty, or so—Mary Davies, who had also thought she heard sounds. There, on the doorstep, lay a pretty little girl-baby, a year old. Miss Agate took her in, and she and Mary brought her up between them—and I don't know which of the two women most loved the child. The name 'Evelyn' was marked in full with red marking-cotton on one of the little garments: nothing more. And that's all the history."

"Miss Agate seems to be a centre of romance."

"There's nothing like having a history of oneself to attract other histories," observed Philip. "All Gertrude Agate's friends have histories. You never find common-place people about her ——"

"But about Miss Evelyn and her history, Philip?" interposed Frank, keeping him to the point.

"Really and truly I have told you all I know of it, Frank. Perhaps our interview with these lawyers may tell us more. You can go with me there." And, this settled, they went out together.

To Frank, the office of Messrs. Dewe and Creed seemed quite an imposing place—a labyrinth of passages, with little rooms opening upon them, and busy clerks flying about.

"They do a great deal of agency work," Philip whispered to Frank, and Frank was as wise as before.

When Philip stated his mission of inquiry, a smart young clerk coolly observed that "this was some private matter: and they would have to wait to see one of the principals." He went away, and returned, and, with an air of much greater civility, invited them to take seats in a tiny sanctum, furnished with hard chairs and a high desk.

They were not detained long. A tall thin gentleman, with grizzled gray hair, and an acute but not unkindly face, presently came in and, announcing himself as Mr. Creed, said he was glad to see them, and ready to give them any information they required. Then he drew up a chair opposite, and sat down; and straightway looked as communicative as the sphinx.

"Well," said Philip, with that easy nonchalance which was to Frank the very greatest wonder in wonderful London, "I will give you my card, as some sort of pledge of my bonâ fides. I would not send it in by the clerk."

Mr. Creed took it with a bow. "A barrister, I presume," he said.

"Yes," replied Philip, "though a briefless one."

The solicitor looked up. Nobody but a rising man would be so outspoken. "Not long to remain such," he said, graciously.

And then Mr. Creed looked at Mr. Philip Connell, and Mr. Philip Connell looked at Mr. Creed. Questions would have to be asked, and neither wished to ask the first, lest it might convey some information really more valuable than the answer to be received.

"Though I am a barrister," began Philip Connell, "you must view me in this matter only as a private gentleman; a clergyman, say, or a family doctor. In short, anybody with a trained discretion and a sense of honour might have been asked to do the duty I am now discharging."

The solicitor bowed. "I understand," he said.

"You had an advertisement in yesterday's papers," commenced Philip. That was a perfectly safe observation, while absolute silence was growing awkward.

"We had," said Mr. Creed, quite at his ease so far.

"Also in a Hampshire paper of the day before?" Philip remarked.

"We had," said Mr. Creed again; but with a perceptible guarding of face, which reminded Frank forcibly of the innocent hypocrisies of the childish game of "hide and seek."

"May I ask what is the significance of that advertisement?" inquired Philip, as airily as if he quite expected a frank answer.

"May I ask what reason you have for being interested therein?" returned Mr. Creed.

"I am entrusted to make this inquiry by a person who has reason to attach a very deep significance to the date mentioned in your advertisement," said Philip. "I presume that the date is the date of an occurrence."

Mr. Creed bowed. "Doubtless the date of many occurrences," he said with a smile.

At this moment the door of the room was opened, and shut again so quickly, that neither Philip nor Frank saw who it was that had looked in.

"But I presume," pursued Philip, "that you announce that date in hopes of eliciting a response from some one or other to whom it bears a special meaning."

"That is the natural inference," avowed Mr. Creed.

The door was opened again; this time by the dapper clerk. He announced that Mr. Dewe wished to speak with his partner for a moment.

Mr. Creed apologised and withdrew. He was absent fully five minutes: and when he came back he looked sharply at Frank. That is to say, he looked at him, for all Mr. Creed's looks were sharp.

"Am I asking too much if I inquire whether this date has any special significance in the county of Hampshire?" resumed Philip.

"Hampshire!" said Mr. Creed, rather tartly, "what makes you think of Hampshire?"

"Because your advertisement was put in a Hampshire paper."

"Oh," said Mr. Creed, quite sweetly. "Perhaps a Hampshire paper is the only country paper of that date you happen to know about."

"The date is so significant," said Philip, "that—my friend—thought it worth while to follow up the advertisement in the London papers, *before* knowing of that in the Hampshire paper. When known, it considerably strengthened the clue."

Mr. Creed bowed again. "Of course, you pardon my reserve," he said. "I have to study the interests of my clients."

"Certainly," assented Philip: "and, at the same time, I am zealous in the cause of my friend."

"This gentleman, I presume?" said Mr. Creed, with another bow in the direction of Frank.

"Oh dear no," Philip answered. The exclamation began with a genuine ring of disclaimer, but the final negative fell rather faintly. The young barrister had been off his guard for a second, but recovered himself immediately. Why need he deny so strenuously if the solicitor chose to take up a wrong scent? But Philip was reckoning without Frank.

"Oh no," struck in Frank, candidly. "It has nothing to do with me, except that it is the date of my own birth—which made me notice it in the newspaper I brought away with me when I left Ravenstoke yesterday. This is not my affair at all."

The lawyer bent forward, and was listening to Frank with encouraging interest. Philip gave a sudden tilt to his chair, which brought its leg sharply down on the floor, as if to put a full stop to Frank's communicativeness. A pause ensued.

"Do you think your friend would have any objection to give me a personal call?" asked the lawyer suavely.

"I should not like to advise it," said Philip, "unless you give me some solid ground to work upon."

"Well," said Mr. Creed, slowly, and toying between every word with a paper-knife, as if the revelation were a subject for painful consideration, "well—I think—I may say—this much: It is the case of—a missing child. The matter concerns—the happiness and well-being—of a wealthy and honourable family—and I can give no detail until I receive details which justify me in thinking we are moving in the right direction. Total disappointment and failure will be preferred to—to any mistake. If those to whom this date and this advertisement can possibly mean anything do not think it worth while to state their own case, I am instructed that my clients will not say the first word."

"Now we know where we are," cried Philip. "Well, as I can make my story clear to you without mentioning names—as, indeed, names are its great want—perhaps it is fair that I should be the frankest. Then, in my story, this date is ascribed to the birth of a certain person."

Mr. Creed gave a gesture of entire attention.

"It is almost all that is known of the birth," Philip went on. "The words, 'Born on the 4th September, 1835,' were written on a piece of paper and pinned to the clothes of a little child, who was left on a certain doorstep in the autumn of 1836."

"The child would then be a year old."

"Precisely so."

"And the child was—?" continued Mr. Creed, and paused with a note of interrogation.

"A pretty little girl," answered Philip.

"Taken to the workhouse, I suppose?" said the solicitor, looking towards the window.

"No," Philip replied, "she was taken in by the family on whose doorstep she was left."

The lawyer was now listening with unfeigned attention. "A very unusual act of charity," he observed. "Was there no clue whatever to the identity of this foundling girl?"

"None," said Philip, emphatically. "She was nicely dressed, and on one of the garments she wore was marked the Christian name Evelyn: nothing more. But in the child's frock there was a pocket, and in it were a few pieces of paper, which the little thing seemed to have played at tearing up, and which had probably not been noticed or remembered. Of course, they were pieced together, with the utterly unsatisfactory result of producing the word 'Hampshire,' and the solitary letter 'h.' The finding of the child was announced in the papers, but nothing came of that. You see a child is something you can't drop accidentally—so its loser is little likely to want to find it again."

"And in what class of life has the girl been reared?" asked Mr. Creed.

"She has received the education of a lady, and has lived under the supervision of one," replied Philip.

"And does she look one? Has she the marks of good breeding?"

"She has a graceful figure and small hands and feet," Philip answered cautiously. "She would be considered a pretty girl," he added, after a moment's pause.

"Well, well," said Mr. Creed, "so far there is a great deal which I think must be worthy of my client's attention; but I feel quite sure I must have a personal interview with the young lady. There may be one or two little points of family resemblance, and—and so on. Can she not come here, accompanied by some friend of her own? Let her appoint her own time—not earlier than the day after to-morrow."

"I daresay it could be arranged," said Philip.

"Then will you write to me, stating whether she will consent to an appointment—and, if so, when it is to be?" said Mr. Creed, rising, and thus intimating that the interview was at an end. "I am deeply

indebted to you for your frankness, and I am sure you must understand and respect my reserve," he continued. "You see your client can easily remain nameless, as long as she chooses. As regards her identity, I am no wiser now than when I first spoke to you." Philip nodded assent. "With my client it is different. The least disclosure might give a clue; which clue, if followed up, might lead to the disastrous and heartbreaking result of pretenders and impostures. If we lawyers always knew our business, Mr. Connell, we might do more work in our offices, and have fewer causes célèbres in our courts."

Mr. Creed saw them to the end of the passage. But as he turned to Mr. Dewe's private room his face was grave and thoughtful.

"I've taken your hint, Creed," said Dewe; "the advertisement is already off to other county papers. It would never do to give a clue to Hampshire. I wonder we did not see that before!"

"We are not used to this sort of work," observed Mr. Creed, rather grimly.

"Who could expect that youngster would be the first to walk into the office, asking questions!" retorted Dewe. "What a blessing he was pointed out to me at Ravenstoke, so that I knew him by sight! I recognised him the moment I opened the door of your room. And a good thing I looked into it when I did!—and had you called out to put you on your guard."

"I was on my guard before," growled Mr. Creed, who was not too well pleased with the business on hand.

"I say, Creed, that youngster evidently smells a rat!"

"Well," assented Mr. Creed, shaking his head, "it is hard to fancy he came here out of mere chance. And yet the barrister has told me a feasible story: and they are going, I believe, to send a girl to see me. But—as for that young Raven, he looked most entirely unconcerned, as if the business had nothing to do with him. Either he does not suspect anything at all, or he is the very best actor on or off any stage."

"Really I did think you two would never come to any understanding, Philip!" exclaimed Frank, as they walked away from the interview. "Why could not you tell your story straight off? What harm would have been in it? As the man says, he is no nearer knowing anything about Evelyn Agate now."

"One can never tell," said Philip. "Besides, he is a solicitor, and I am a barrister, and, unless I can bamboozle him a little, he would never trust me to bamboozle anybody else—never give me a brief. I don't believe I did it half well enough. My conscience is reproaching me that I was a great deal too soft. And who asked you to tell him about your birthday?"

"Why, it came out naturally," answered Frank. "That could not signify anyway."

"Well, then, don't burden the world with useless facts, and don't throw away useful ones," retorted Philip. "And now for home, that

I may write a letter to Gertrude Agate, and tell her all I have done in her cause, and that if she chooses to take Evelyn to see Mr. Creed, she can write to me and name her hour, and I will accompany her."

"It was very good of her to take in the poor little baby."

"Ah, there was an empty place awaiting it! And my firm belief is, that those who left it there knew that," added Philip.

"Is Miss Agate well off?" asked Frank, quite at sea among the new ways of life into which he was being introduced.

"Yes, and no," was the reply. "She has nothing but what she earns, but then she buys nothing but what she wants, does nothing but what she chooses, and consequently finds her expenditure considerably within her income."

"I suppose she works a great deal with her pen?" said Frank, with grave reverence.

"Yes," nodded Philip. "Yet she has much leisure. What she does comes easily off her pen, though I won't say it may have gone very easily into her heart. She uses a red ink, which is fearfully expensive, though it makes a clear and striking manuscript."

"Red ink! Expensive!"

"Yes. You may be wanting some yourself soon, Frank. For it is used for other purposes than writing. It is only life-blood."

Frank hardly understood. "Don't you mean to go and see her this evening—as you half promised?" said he, to change the subject.

"No. But she won't let the grass grow under her feet; we shall have an answer from her to-night, appointing a time to go to the lawyers'. You see I have literally nothing to tell her."

Philip was right. The two young men were once more smoking their evening cigars when the last post brought a letter from Miss Agate, in reply to Philip's hasty note.

"She's an aggravating woman!" he cried, as he tossed it to Frank. "Is it not too bad! I told her there was no need for these lawyers to know her name or address: even if she chose to write to them herself, instead of letting me. Just see what she says!"

"DEAR MR. CONNELL,—Many thanks for your great promptitude and for the kind offer of your escort. But why should we trouble you further? Evelyn and I will go to Portugal Street at noon on Saturday. I have written to Mr. Creed to say so. There is no necessity for any secrecy on our side, so I bade him address to me here, if our appointment was inconvenient to him. And I signed myself, as I do now, "Yours faithfully,

"GERTRUDE AGATE."

"I think that is a very sensible and straightforward thing for Miss Agate to have done," cried Frank. "I can't understand beating about the bush for no object."

"Object!" echoed Philip. "Why, it is like playing at whist with a partner who sees no 'object' in not showing her cards! Besides,

Miss Agate ought to have seen a reason for not proclaiming her name! Look at the undue advantage it gives Creed! Of course, he will know everything at once!"

"What is there to know?"

Philip looked at the questioner. "Does the name of Agate suggest nothing to you, Frank?"

"Nothing at all. Except that it is a singular name."

"You are not much over twenty," returned Philip. "Of course, you did not read newspapers in your cradle. Any more than did I, for that matter. But since then my reading, as a lawyer, has lain among old cases, precedents, and so forth. So, I presume, has Mr. Creed's. Therefore, he will recognise the name of Agate; may go down to the Detective Department at Scotland Yard, and ask if the name is known there. I don't suppose the staff are entirely changed, even in the course of twenty years. Though, if so, they won't have allowed a standing reward of five hundred pounds to slip from their books—even in that time."

"Why, what are you talking of, Philip?"

"She is an aggravating woman!" was all Philip reiterated. "Her extraordinary frankness will only make Creed think there is some very cunning cheatery about the whole affair. Never can I get her to understand that, if you honestly wish people to believe the truth, you generally have to tell them a lie. The world is taught on its very copybooks that 'appearances are deceitful.' When I am at my wit's end to get more credit, I always tell my tradesmen I'm very hard up. They think I'd never say so if it was true!"

"Well, all I can say is, that I am glad to have met Miss Agate; or I might think London morals as hazy as London streets."

And there rose up in Frank's mind a picture of the sweeping fields at Ravenstoke, with the pale light dying on the edge of the horizon, and the great trees closing up round the old hall, and the maid-servants stealing across the lawn to have a gossip in the village, while the footman drew the curtains of the drawing-room and shut in the lamplight. His mother would be sipping her tea; Leonard wandering about the room glancing at newspapers and dipping into books.

Frank could never have imagined that at that moment Leonard handed his mother a telegram, just delivered to him; and that she read it with half-blinded eyes and a reeling brain.

"From Messrs. Dewe and Creed, London, to Leonard Raven, Esq.—Two ladies are coming to our office at noon on Saturday in response to advertisement. Report promising. Telegraph instructions."

"Leonard, Leonard," said his mother, seizing both her son's hands and clinging to him, "I must go up to London."

"You will only compromise yourself in some way, mother," dissented Leonard. "Better wait and see what they find out."

"Tell them, the solicitors, to take care I don't compromise myself

—lawyers can always do that," gasped Mrs. Raven. "But oh, Leonard, I cannot sit here waiting. It might be a saving of doubt and trouble if I were on the spot. I am not rash, Leonard. See! I am calm; quite calm."

Her son looked at her doubtfully, and spoke unwillingly. "Well, mother, I suppose you must do as you will."

And then Mrs. Raven went upstairs to her own chamber, and stood there in the dark, looking out at the moonbeams sleeping on the heavily laden branches—the same moonbeams that stole into Frank's City bedroom.

If poor Frank had dreamed of such things in his troubled slumbers he would, on awaking, have only sighed, "How wild dreams are!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### IN THE LAWYERS' OFFICE.

On Friday night James Sloam, the page, took down orders that the little basket chaise was to be ready early next morning to drive Mrs. Raven to the railway station.

She came down stairs, muffled in her fur cloak and widow's veil. Leonard did not rise to see her off. Little attentions had never been in his line: moreover, he did not altogether approve of the expedition. To take his breakfast frequently in bed was but a result of his sickly boyhood.

Mrs. Raven took her drive in silence. James Sloam, a good-humoured, country-looking lad, saw nothing significant in that. Mrs. Raven seldom spoke to her under-servants, unless to complain.

On the platform they found Charity Hale. She was to travel by the same train as Mrs. Raven, but only as far as the market town, Standchester. It was one of Charity Hale's duties, though neither cook nor housekeeper, but simply the upper servant of all, to cater weekly for such commodities as the Home Farm did not furnish.

Mrs. Raven gave a start when she saw Charity, angrily wondering what brought her there, but the next minute recalled the fact that she was only where she ought to be, on that day and at that hour. Still, her presence brought uneasiness. From her carriage window Mrs. Raven watched her talking to James Sloam, before the train moved off. And at Standchester she watched again to see Charity alight from her third-class carriage: and when the woman was lost amidst the crowd on the platform she felt more at ease. Mrs. Raven was in that nervous and shaken condition when fear attaches itself quite unreasonably to everything. The train waited here ten minutes. It was about to start on again, when another passenger appeared in great haste, and was put in the carriage behind Mrs. Raven's.

This was a tall woman, wearing the dark dress, mantle, and ample

veil which generally indicate a nursing sister or a member of some other benevolent association. Mrs. Raven wondered idly who she was—whether there had been illness anywhere in the neighbourhood, and this was somebody who had been engaged to tend the case, or whether she was some person connected with the new Vicar of Charl, who was reported to be so very High Church.

At the London terminus Mrs. Raven called a cab, and gave the driver the address of the office to which she was bound. She never noticed the tall woman, who moved unobtrusively among the hubbub. She also called a cab and gave her directions; and the cab followed that of Mrs. Raven.

Mrs. Raven found both the lawyers in attendance to receive her—this lady, whose case had been put before them by her son, with many hints and reservations which puzzled them exceedingly. So darkly, indeed, had her requirements been stated by Leonard, that much of Mr. Creed's cautiousness in his interview with Philip Connell was entirely assumed—his secret being that safest of all secrets, one unknown to himself.

As Philip suspected, the signature and address of Miss Agate's note had given the lawyers a certain clue to the past, which undoubtedly did not lessen their interest in the present case. They were genuinely attentive. Even solicitors are but men. These two had known family histories, and had mysteries laid plainly before them, which they could survey and grasp. But here they had a mystery that was still mysterious—a new chapter in an old story which had thrilled society more than twenty years ago—another act cropping up in that strange drama.

Mr. Creed, the older man, though his name stood last, disliked all business but conveyancing; yet, from the time of Miss Agate's note, he almost forgave Mr. Dewe for his tendency to dive into what he, in his older and steadier mind, generally called "dirty byways."

"You are very punctual, madam," the elder lawyer said to Mrs. Raven. "Probably the ladies who are coming will not keep us long waiting. Will you care to see the note we received from them? Then you will be in possession of all the facts we have ourselves."

The two partners had agreed that this letter should be shown. Mr. Creed watched Mrs. Raven as she read it. He thought her face grew a little paler. But he was not sure; it was so pale already.

"Do you remember the name of Agate?" he asked, very quietly. And there was no mistake that she started at the question.

"Yes—no. I—I think I have heard it before," she answered.

"Probably," said Mr. Creed. "So have we. So I think have most people who have lived to our age."

"I remembered it directly I saw it," interrupted the younger man, Dewe; "and we referred to an old newspaper to verify facts. It is almost impossible that both name and address can be mere coincidences. This Miss Agate must be of that same family."

The widow sat with open eyes and parted lips.

"Perhaps, madam, your memory does not serve you," observed Mr. Creed. "The facts were these: In the autumn of eighteen hundred and thirty-five a family of the name of Agate, living in the house whence this Miss Agate now writes, lost an infant child. It was kidnapped on the very day of its birth, presumably by the woman who had acted as nurse, since she disappeared at the same time, and could never be traced. Large rewards were offered for the child's recovery. All England rang with the story."

"I don't remember hearing of this at all," spoke Mrs. Raven, gathering what courage she could. "I do not read the papers much at any time, and I was ill at that date."

Before her mind rose up a vision of those far back days, when she had lain in the hushed state chamber at Raven, with Frank upon her arm. She could see the Squire steal in, on tiptoe. She could hear Charity's thin voice eagerly declaring that the dear lady had done justice to the old stock at last, and that the babe was no weakling this time, but a bonny boy. She could see herself, at hearing those words, turn upon her pillow, weeping bitter tears, and crushing and clutching the dainty sheets in her feeble hands. No! it was not likely she had read the newspapers.

"You may be sure that such an incident had terrible effects on the bereaved family," said Mr. Creed. "It was soon followed by a sad tragedy. But I need not go into that. It really had nothing to do with the boy who had been lost—or with the girl, either, who was found, almost exactly one year afterwards."

Mrs. Raven looked at him eagerly. "A girl was found!"

"Yes; left on the doorstep. She is coming here with Miss Agate to-day."

"Can I see these ladies when they come—without their knowing it? It is not desirable that they should see me."

"Certainly it is not," said Mr. Dewe. "We can arrange all that. You may see them through this little window. Pray observe that the clear stars on the ground glass give a command of the next room without revealing anybody who may happen to be on this side. It is really a very handy arrangement."

"Though I'm sure we never thought of such a use for it before," interposed his partner.

"Is there any special question you would like put to these people, madam?" resumed Mr. Dewe.

"Oh dear no," said Mrs. Raven, with a strange shrinking; and the observant solicitors thought she had seemed oddly timid and mistrustful since the mention of the Agates. "Yet I think I should like to ask about the mother of this boy, who, as you say, was kidnapped," she added, as an afterthought. "Yes, and about the nurse: she who was suspected of kidnapping him."

Mr. Creed assented, and made one or two notes.

"I wish I could hear the answers myself," observed Mrs. Raven, with a suppressed eagerness of manner. "I suppose that is quite impossible."

"I don't think so," said Mr. Dewe. "That starred window opens at the top, and if we draw it down a little, you will hear the voices well."

"And you might ask if the father of the missing boy is still living," continued Mrs. Raven, in the most common-place manner, though she thought her breath would never hold out during those few words.

"We can ask that, too," said Mr. Creed. "And now, madam, there is something else I must tell you. It may mean nothing at all. I only mention it because I do not choose to conceal aught from you, nor to penetrate into your confidence further than you desire. You remember I wrote you word that it was a gentleman who came here on behalf of this Miss Agate. He was accompanied by your second son, Mr. Frank Raven."

The widow's pale face turned perceptibly paler this time. Something like a spasm contracted her thin lips. Her voice shook as she spoke. "Who was the other gentleman?"

"A Mr. Philip Connell, a young barrister—a very clever young man, I should fancy," said the solicitor. "He came here as an old friend of Miss Agate's, empowered by her to make inquiries."

"Oh—that is my nephew—my husband's nephew," said Mrs. Raven; "Frank is staying with him. Was my son interested in this matter?"

"It is impossible to say," replied Mr. Creed. "The only remark he made during the interview was, that he had casually noticed our advertisement in the Hampshire paper because the date it named was that of his own birth. Mr. Dewe looked into the room accidentally, and recognised him from having seen him in the village when he waited on you at Ravenscourt."

"Did Frank see Mr. Dewe?" asked the widow, rather quickly.

"No," said Mr. Dewe, speaking for himself. "I am quite sure he did not. I do not suppose he has ever seen me."

"I am glad of that," observed Mrs. Raven, speaking with great deliberation. "It is not necessary that he should know anything of this affair. He is but young yet, and rather flighty, and if he knew anything he would have to know all, and it might make him look upon some things in an unwholesome light. My eldest son and I came to that conclusion."

"Of course we kept you and your instructions entirely out of sight," said Mr. Creed. "They ——"

He was interrupted. A clerk handed in a card to him.

"Here are the ladies," said the lawyer, in a lowered tone. "Now, Mrs. Raven, if anything arises during our interview on which you want further information, touch that hand-bell, and I will wait upon you."

Mrs. Raven took up her station at the window between the rooms, and watched the two strangers as they entered the other one. It did

not strike her she was doing a dishonourable thing. She was sinning on the line that she had sinned through her whole life; and never, until that vein of sinfulness is nearing its end, do we detect its darkness. So little was she accustomed to regard her actions in relation to anybody but herself, that she did not even see the significance of Mr. Creed's words, as he took a chair opposite the Agates.

"I must ask you to remember," he began, speaking to Miss Agate, "that I am bound to report every word you say to my client. I mean that I wish you to understand that no statement you make to me can be regarded as in any way confidential."

"I comprehend," answered Gertrude Agate in her bell-like tones. "I am afraid we have only too little statement to make. I believe Mr. Connell has already told you the few and simple details of the finding of my adopted niece, this young lady, on my door-step, with the record pinned to her clothes: 'Born the 4th of September, 1835'?"

"He has done so," said Mr. Creed, with a polite bow and a glance in the direction of the young lady. "Still there remain a few questions which have occurred to me. And you must pardon me if these relate somewhat to your own family history. Your name," added the lawyer, "recalled to my mind the sad story of the little stolen babe who more than twenty years ago was taken from the very house whence you dated your note to me. I presume, therefore, that baby boy was some relation of yours."

"He is my nephew," said Gertrude Agate, quickly. In her mind she had always kept that child in the present tense.

"Naturally the story of the child which you lost, and of the child which you found, connect themselves in one's mind."

"Certainly," Gertrude Agate answered frankly, "I can never separate the two. I absolutely hope they are connected. It gives a double chance to the solution of the mystery."

As the lawyer turned over his papers he glanced again at the young lady, who, in spite of her elaborate braids and her aristocratic tournure, did not impress him nearly so much either with breed or possible beauty as did her little eager-eyed, dark-haired friend.

"Well, madam, I must ask—pardon me for it—whether your brother, the lost child's father, is still living?" inquired Mr. Creed.

"Yes," answered Gertrude Agate, with a checked sigh.

"I remember all the circumstances of the case," spoke the lawyer, quite sympathetically. "Everybody's pity went with him. May I inquire whether he is still in confinement?"

"He is at home with me," she answered with a sad simplicity.

"But he lives quite shut up," put in the younger lady, Evelyn Agate. "He has never even seen me."

"May I also ask what was the maiden name of the poor lady, his wife?" continued Mr. Creed.

"Marian Snow," shortly replied Miss Agate. "An orphan. Ah,

she was a sweet girl when my brother married her : good, gentle, lady-like, accomplished. I never thought he loved her half enough, and yet he loved her very truly, and was a good and tender husband—till the terrible end came."

"I find the monthly nurse was suspected of the baby's abduction," Mr. Creed went on. "You see, Miss Agate, I have been refreshing my memory with the details from an ancient newspaper. Do you remember anything about this woman?—But you must have been very young at that time."

"I was sixteen," replied Gertrude Agate ; "I am eight-and-thirty now. I remember her perfectly. I am always quite sure it was she who took away the baby—only three hours after his birth. Every trace of her also vanished. My poor sister-in-law had hired her accidentally, and we could never find out where she had lived. I am certain I should know her if I saw her. I kept her image in my eyes and in my mind from that day, and have watched for her in the streets. She was a tall woman, with black eyes, and when she spoke she made long pauses between the sentences. I did not like her from the first, and her manner to me was rude and strange."

"What was the baby like?" asked Mr. Creed.

Gertrude Agate shook her head. "He seemed to have brown eyes," she said ; "but you cannot tell at that early age, and they may have turned out blue later. He was a bonnie bairn, and I would give all I have to find him now."

"Well, it was very kind of you to take in the foundling girl in his stead, and I'm sure she has done you credit," said Mr. Creed, inwardly adding, "Heaven forgive me for telling a fib."

"Yes, it was very kind," interrupted Evelyn Agate; "but I may have lost something by the exchange, and that boy has got it! Perhaps something that a girl could not inherit? And that's such a shame, for women want money more than men! He could have been a doctor—or a lawyer—or anything. But I can be only ——"

"Only what?" asked Mr. Creed, as she hesitated.

"A lady's companion. It is what we have thought of—what I should like well enough."

"And I'm sure you ought to find that position delightful."

"Oh, I don't know," returned the young lady, whom Mr. Creed mentally recorded as "the young person." "I want to see a somewhat different life, and I am looking out for an appointment : and I could not help hoping this might lead to some disclosure about me—and give her dear nephew back to Aunt Gertrude."

"Well," said Mr. Creed, rising, "I will write you a line, madam, as soon as I have seen my client. All that you have told me conveys nothing to me personally, but it shall be reported. Good morning."

He hastened to Mrs. Raven. Her face was deadly white, and she had bitten her under-lip until it had turned a bright vermilion : and she had put on her gloves as if quite ready to depart.

"You never asked what had become of the stolen boy's mother," she began, almost accusingly.

"My dear madam," exclaimed Mr. Creed, "I knew that. That was the most awful end of the tragedy. Directly after that baby was stolen, the husband, Theodore Agate, who had been already overtasking himself with severe brain work, suddenly fell into a state of acute mania. In this terrible condition he rushed into the presence of his poor wife, and would have attacked her. That was prevented, but the shock killed her. The unhappy gentleman was confined for a while, and then he was given up to the care of his relatives. I could let you have an old newspaper with the whole story."

Mrs. Raven paced the little apartment.

"It is all no use," she said, "it will not do. I am frightened. It is not right that I should stir in this pursuit. Write to these people, please, and tell them your client has nothing to do with their matters: it was a mistake. Put a stop at once to anything more at present. Perhaps I may write again to you."

"It shall be exactly as you wish, madam," remarked Mr. Creed rather coldly, as he showed her out of the room and downstairs, placing the newspaper beside her in the cab.

She never even remembered to bid him a civil good morning. Therefore she was in no condition to observe that the nunlike woman she had noticed on the Standchester platform was now quietly seated in a confectioner's shop at the corner of the street.

"Well," said Mr. Creed to his partner, "I never did like this class of work—never!"

"Glorious lawsuits begin thus, though," returned the other.

"Glorious stirrings up of mud," retorted Mr. Creed, "and the dirt is sure to splash in the wrong faces! Fancy my making that dear little woman open up all the old history of her household skeleton for nothing! And what is the meaning of Mrs. Raven's present queer start? Did she have an hallucination when she began this quest?—or now when she has ended it?—or, as her son thinks, at the time she says it happened? Her bill shall be a pretty stiff one. I was afraid of some such work when we were to be called in for a special case that wasn't to go to the family solicitors. I wish you would be more careful, Dewe!"

And away, back to Ravenstoke, went Mrs. Raven of the Court, with only an old newspaper in her hand: but it seemed to her as if the porter's cries, nay, the very wheels of the train, repeated four words she had read therein:

"The madman, Theodore Agate!"

(*To be continued.*)

## AMONG THE DAISIES.

Among the daisies she nestled down,
And, plucking one tiny bud,
She peeped through her lashes of hazel brown
At its beautiful crimson hood;
And shaking the ant from its tiny head,
She lifted it up to her lips,
And whispered *his* name, with a cheek as red
As the bloom on its fragrant tips.

"I love him more than you love the star
That watches your dreams at night;
And his laughing presence is dearer far
Than the dew to your chalice bright.
Take care, take care that you never tell
The folly I've whispered to you!"—
And above its petals her kisses fell,
Like the dripping of evening dew.

"I love! I love!" and her voice grew bland
As the breeze from the gentle south;
"I love! I love!"—but a strong brown hand
Was laid o'er her smiling mouth.
"You love; you love!"—and the brown hand twined
Through the beams of her sunny hair.
"They love; they love!" sang the tell-tale wind,
Through the locks of the whispering pair.

And the shy wee daisy was borne away
From the fluttering girlish breast,
And the rough smith smiled as it coyly lay
In the crease of his open vest;
As though it were gracing the loveliest place
In the forge where he gaily toiled,
It smiled through the smoke, with its sweet round face,
Till its leaves were all smeared and soiled.

Up went his sledge with a right good will,
Then down with a merry clang;
Louder and louder, and louder still,
As he whistled the tunes *she* sang;
And he tossed his crisp locks, as he blithely cried,
"How delightful this toiling will be
When you, love, are tending our own ingleside,
And watching, my darling, for me.

* * * * *

A rush of wind—and the daisy lay,
'Mid the spoils on the smithy floor,
Never to welcome the soft-eyed day,
Or the song of the blackbird more!
Then the blacksmith lifted the faded thing,
Saying, "Little I thought that this,
The most common flower of the field, could bring
Such a vision of perfect bliss!" Fanny Forrester.

## A MYSTERY.

I SHALL always say, always think, it was a curious thing we chanced to go that day, of all days, to Pigeon Green. It is not chance that brings about these strange coincidences.

> "There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will."

Pigeon Green, a small colony of a dozen houses, formed a triangle, as may be said, with Timberdale and Evesham, being a few miles distant from each. Old Mr. and Mrs. Beele, life-long friends of the Squire, lived here. Their nephew had brought his newly-married wife from London to show her to them, and we were all invited to dinner. As the Squire did not care to be out in the dark, his sight not being what it used to be, the dinner hour was fixed for two o'clock. We started in the large open phaeton, the Squire driving his favourite horses, Bob and Blister. It was the nineteenth of October. Mrs. Todhetley complained of the cold as we went along. The lovely weather of September had left us; early winter seemed to be setting in with a vengeance. The easterly wind was unusually high, and the skies were leaden.

On this same wintry morning Mr. St. George left Timberdale in his gig for Worcester, accompanied by Ellin Delorane. St. George had business to transact with Philip West, a lawyer, who was Mr. Delorane's agent in Worcester. Philip West lived in the Foregate Street, his offices being in the same house. Ellin was very intimate with his wife, formerly Mary Coney, and was invited to spend a few days with her. It was Aunt Hester who had urged the acceptance of this invitation: seeing that Ellin was nervous at the non-arrival of her lover, William Brook, was peeping into the newspapers for accounts of shipwrecks and other calamities at sea. So they set off after breakfast, Ellin well wrapped up, in this stylish gig of Mr. St. George's. There are gigs and gigs, you know, and I assure you some gigs were yet fashionable vehicles in those days.

It was bitterly cold. St. George, remarking that they should have snow as soon as the high wind would let it come down, urged his handsome grey horse to a fleet pace, and they soon reached Worcester. He drove straight to Foregate Street, which lay at the other end of the town, set down Ellin, and then went back again to leave his horse and gig at the Hare and Hounds in College Street, the inn at which he generally put up, retracing his steps on foot to Mr. West's.

And now I must return to ourselves.

After a jolly dinner at two o'clock with the Beeles, and a jolly dessert after it, including plenty of fresh filberts and walnuts, and

upon that a good cup of tea and some buttered toast, we began to think about getting home. When the phaeton came round, the Squire remarked that it was half an hour later than he had meant to start; upon which, old Beele laid the fault of its looking late to the ungenial weather of the evening.

We drove off. Dusk was approaching; the leaden skies looked dark and sullen, the wind, unpleasantly high all day, had increased to nearly a hurricane. It roared round our heads, it whistled wildly through the trees and hedges, it shook the very ears of Bob and Blister; the few flakes of snow or sleet beginning then to fall were whirled about in the air like demons. It was an awful evening, no mistake about that; and a very unusual one for the middle of October.

The Squire faced the storm as well as he could, his coat collar turned up, his cloth cap, kept for emergencies in a pocket of the carriage, tied down well on his ears. Mrs. Todhetley tied a knitted grey shawl right over her bonnet. We, in the back seat, had much ado to keep our hats on: I sat right behind the Squire, Tod behind Mrs. Todhetley. It was about the worst drive I remember. The wild wind, keen as a knife, stung our faces, and seemed at times as if it had a mind to whirl us, carriage and horses and all, in the air, as it was whirling the sleet and snow.

Tod stood up to speak to his father. "Shall I drive, sir?" he asked. "Perhaps you would be more sheltered if you sat here behind."

Tod's driving in those days was regarded by the Squire with remarkable disparagement, and Tod received only a sharp answer—which could not be heard for the wind.

We got along somehow in the teeth of the storm. The route lay chiefly through by-ways, solitary and unfrequented, not in the good, open turnpike roads. For about a mile, midway between Pigeon Green and Timberdale, was an ultra dreary spot; dreary in itself and dreary in its associations. It was called Dip Lane, possibly because the ground dipped there so much that it lay in a hollow; overgrown dark elm trees grew thickly on each side it, their branches nearly meeting overhead. In the brightest summer's day the place was gloomy, so you may guess how it looked now.

But the downward dip and the dark elm trees did not constitute all the dreariness of Dip Lane. Many years before, a murder had been committed there. The Squire used to tell us of the commotion it caused, all the gentlemen for miles and miles round bestirring themselves to search out the murderers. He himself was a little fellow of five or six years old, and could just remember what a talk it made. A wealthy farmer, belated, riding through the lane from market one dark night, was attacked and pulled from his horse. The assailants beat him to death, rifled his pockets of a large sum, for he had been selling stock, and dragged him *through the hedge*, making a large gap

in it. Across the field, near its opposite side, was the round, deep stagnant piece of water known as Dip Pond (popularly supposed to be too deep to have any bottom); and it was conjectured that the object of the murderers, in dragging him through the hedge, was to conceal the body beneath the dark and slimy water, and that they must have been disturbed by someone passing in the lane. Anyway, the body was found in the morning lying in the field a few yards from the gap in the hedge, pockets turned inside out, and watch and seals gone. The poor frightened horse had made its way home, and stayed whinnying by the stable door all night.

The men were never found. A labourer, hastening through the lane earlier in the evening, with some medicine from the doctor's for his sick wife, had noticed two foot-pads, as he described them, standing under a tree. That these were the murderers, then waiting for prey, possibly for this very gentleman they attacked, nobody had any doubt of; but they were never traced. Whoever they were, they got clear off with their booty, and—the Squire would always add when telling the story to a stranger—with their wicked consciences, which he sincerely hoped tormented them ever afterwards.

But the most singular fact in the affair remains to be told. From that night nothing would grow on the spot in the hedge over which the murdered man was dragged, and on which his blood had fallen. The blood-stains were easily got rid of, but the hedge, though replanted more than once, never grew again; and the gap remained in it still. Report went that the farmer's ghost haunted it—that, I am sure, you will not be surprised to hear, ghosts being so popular—and might be seen hovering around it on a moonlit night.

And amid the many small coincidences attending the story (my story) which I am trying to place clearly before you, was this one: that the history of the murder was gone over that day at Mr. Beele's. Some remark led to the subject as we sat round the dessert-table, and Mrs. Frank Beele, who had never heard of it, inquired what it was. Upon that, the Squire and old Beele recounted it to her, each ransacking his memory to help the other with fullest particulars.

To go on with our homeward journey. Battling along, we at length plunged into Dip Lane—which, to its other recommendations, added that of being inconveniently narrow—and Tod, peering outwards in the gloomy dusk, fancied he saw some vehicle before us. Bringing his keen sight to bear upon it, he stood up to reconnoitre, and made it out to be a gig, going the same way that we were. The wind was not quite so bad in this low spot, and the snow and sleet had ceased for a bit.

"Take care, father," said Tod: "there's a gig on ahead."

"A gig, Joe?"

"Yes, it's a gig: and going at a strapping pace."

But the Squire was going at a strapping pace also, and driving two fresh horses, whereas the gig had but one horse. We caught it up in

no time. It slackened speed slightly as it drew close to the hedge on that side, to give us room to pass. In a moment we saw it was St. George's gig, St. George driving.

"Halloa!" called out Tod as we shot by, and his shout was loud enough to frighten the ghost at the gap, which lively spot we were fast approaching, "there's William Brook! Father, pull up: there's William Brook!"

Brook was sitting with St. George. His coat was well buttoned up, a white woollen comforter folded round his neck and chin, and a low-crowned, wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his brows. I confess that but for Tod's shout I should not have recognised him—muffled up like that.

Anxious to get home, out of the storm, the Squire paid no heed to Tod's injunction of pulling up. He just turned his head for a moment towards the gig, but drove on at the same speed as before. All we could do was to call out every welcome we could think of to William Brook as we looked back, and to pull off our hats and wave them frantically.

William Brook pulled off his, and waved it to us in return. *I saw him do it.* He called out something also, no doubt a greeting. At least, I thought he did; but the wind swept by with a gust at the moment, and it might have been St. George's voice and not his.

"Johnny, lad, it's better than nuts," cried Tod to me, all excitement for once, as he fixed his hat on his head again. "How glad I am!—for Nelly's sake. But what on earth brings the pair of them—he and St. George—in Dip Lane?"

Another minute or so, and we reached the gap in the hedge. I turned my eyes to it and to the pond beyond it in a kind of fascination; I was sure to do so whenever I went by, but that was seldom; and the conversation at the dessert-table had opened the wretched details afresh. Almost immediately afterwards, the gig wheels behind us, which I could hear above the noise of the wind, seemed to me to come to a sudden standstill. "St. George has stopped," I exclaimed to Tod. "Not a bit of it," answered he; "we can no longer hear him." Nearly close upon that, we passed the turning which led out of the lane towards Evesham. Not heeding anything of all this, as indeed why should he, the Squire dashed straight onwards, and in time we gained our homestead, Crabb Cot.

The first thing the Squire did, when we were all gathered round the welcome fire, blazing and crackling with wood and coal, and the stormy blasts beat on the window panes but no longer upon us, was to attack us for making that noise in Dip Lane, and for shouting out that it was Brook.

"It was Brook, father," said Tod. "St. George was driving him."

"Nonsense, Joe," reprimanded the Squire. "William Brook has not landed from the high seas yet. And, if he had landed, what should bring him in Dip Lane—or St. George either?"

"It was St. George," persisted Tod.

"Well, that might have been. It looked like his grey horse. Where was he coming from, I wonder?"

"Mr. St. George went to Worcester this morning, sir," interposed Thomas, who had come in with some glasses, the Squire having asked for some hot brandy-and-water. "Giles saw his man Japhet this afternoon, and he said his master had gone off in his gig to Worcester for the day."

"Then he must have picked up Brook at Worcester," said Tod, in his decisive way.

"May be so," conceded the Squire, coming round to reason. "But I don't see what they could be doing in Dip Lane."

## II.

THE storm had disappeared the following morning, but the ground was white with a thin coating of snow; and in the afternoon, when we started for Timberdale to call on William Brook, the sky was blue and the sun shining. Climbing up from the Ravine and crossing the field beyond it to the high road, we met Darbyshire, the surgeon, striding along as fast as his legs would carry him.

"You seem to be in a hurry," remarked the Squire.

"Just sent for to a sick patient over yonder," replied Darbyshire, nodding to some cottages in the distance. "Dying, the report is; supposed to have swallowed poison. Daresay it will turn out to be a case of cucumber."

He was speeding on when Tod asked whether he had seen William Brook yet. Darbyshire turned to face him, looking surprised.

"Seen Brook yet! No; how should I see him? Brook's not come, is he?"

"He got home last night. St. George drove him from Worcester in his gig," said Tod, and went on to explain that we had passed them in Dip Lane. Darbyshire was uncommonly pleased. Brook was a favourite of his.

"I am surprised that I have not seen him," he cried; "I have been about all the morning. St. George was in Worcester yesterday, I know. Wonder, though, what induced them to make a pilgrimage through Dip Lane!"

Just, you see, as the rest of us had wondered.

We went on towards Mrs. Brook's. But in passing Mr. Delorane's, Aunt Hester's head appeared above the Venetian blind of the dining-room. She began nodding cordially.

"How lively she looks," exclaimed the Squire. "Pleased that he is back, I take it. Suppose we go in?"

The front door was standing open, and we went in unannounced. Aunt Hester, sitting then at the little work-table, making herself a cap with lace and pink ribbons, got up and tried to shake hands with all three of us at once.

"We are on our way to call on William Brook," cried the Squire, as we sat down, and Aunt Hester was taking up her work again.

"On William Brook!—why, what do you mean?" she exclaimed. "Has he come?"

"You don't mean to say you did not know it—that he has not been to see you?" cried the Squire.

"I don't know a thing about it; I did not know he had come; nobody has told me," rejoined Aunt Hester. "As to his coming to see me—well, I suppose he would not feel himself at liberty to do that until Mr. Delorane gave permission. When did he arrive? I am so glad."

"And he is not much behind his time, either," observed Tod.

"Not at all behind it, to speak of, only we were impatient. The truth is, I caught somewhat of Ellin's fears," added Aunt Hester, looking at us over her spectacles, which she rarely wore higher than the end of her nose. "Ellin has had gloomy ideas about his never coming back at all; and one can't see a person perpetually sighing away in silence, without sighing a bit also for company. Did he get here this morning? What a pity Ellin is at Worcester!"

We told Aunt Hester all about it, just as we had told Darbyshire, but not quite so curtly, for she was not in a hurry to be off to a poisoned patient. She dropped her work to listen, and took off her spectacles, looking, however, uncommonly puzzled.

"What a singular thing—that you should chance to have been in Dip Lane just at the time they were!—and why should they have chosen that dreary route? But—but——"

"But what, ma'am?" cried the Squire.

"Well, I am thinking what could have been St. George's motive for concealing the news from me when he came round here last night to tell me he had left Ellin safely at Philip West's," replied she.

"Did he say nothing to you about William Brook?"

"Not a word. He said what a nasty drive home it had been in the teeth of the storm and wind, but he did not mention William Brook. He seemed tired, and did not stay above a minute or two. John was out.—Oh, here is John."

Mr. Delorane, hearing our voices, I suppose, came in from the office. Aunt Hester told him the news at once—that William Brook was come home.

"I am downright glad," interrupted the lawyer emphatically. "What with one delay and another, one might have begun to think him lost: it was September, you know, that he originally announced himself for. What do you say?"—his own words having partly drowned Aunt Hester's—"St. George drove him home last night from Worcester? Drove Brook? Nonsense! Had St. George brought Brook he would have told me of it."

"But he did bring him, sir," affirmed Tod: and he went over the history once more. Mr. Delorane did not take it in.

"Are these lads playing a joke upon me, Squire?" asked he.

"Look here, Delorane. That we passed St. George in Dip Lane is a fact; I knew the cut of his gig and horse. Somebody was with him; I saw that much. The boys called out that it was William Brook, and began shouting to him. Whether it was he, or not, I can't say; I had enough to do with my horses, I can tell you; they did not like the wind, Blister especially."

"It was William Brook, safe enough, sir," interposed Tod. "Do you think I don't know him? We spoke to him, and he spoke to us. Why should you doubt it?"

"Well, I suppose I can't doubt it, as you speak so positively," said Mr. Delorane. "The news took me by surprise, you see. Why on earth did St. George not tell me of it? I shall take him to task when he comes in. Anyway, I am glad Brook's come. We will drink his health."

He opened what was in those days called the cellaret—and a very convenient article it was for those who drank wine as a rule—and put on the table some of the glasses that were standing on the sideboard. Then we drank health and happiness to William Brook.

"And to somebody else also," cried bold Tod, winking at Aunt Hester.

"You two boys can go on to Mrs. Brook's," cried the Squire; "I shall stop here a bit. Tell William I am glad he has surmounted the perils of the treacherous seas."

"And tell him he may come to see me if he likes," added the lawyer. "I expect he did not get a note I wrote to him a few months back, or he'd have been here this morning."

Away we went to Mrs. Brook's. And the first thing that flabbergasted us (the expression was Tod's, not mine) was to be met by a denial of the servant's. Upon Tod asking to see Mr. William, she stared at us and said he was not back from his travels.

"Come in," called out Minty from the parlour; "I know your voices." She sat at the table, her paint-box before her. Minty painted very nice pieces in water colours: the one in process was a lovely bit of scenery taken from Little Malvern. Mrs. Brook was out.

"What did I hear you saying to Ann about William—that he had come home?" she began to us, without getting up from her work—for we were too intimate to be upon any ceremony with one another. "He is not come yet. I only wish he was."

"But he is come," said Tod. "He came last night. We saw him and spoke to him."

Minty put down her camel-hair pencil then, and turned round. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Mr. St. George drove William home from Worcester. We passed them in the gig in Dip Lane."

Minty retorted by asking whether we were not dreaming; and for a

minute or two we kept at cross-purposes. She held to it that they had seen nothing of her brother; that he was not at Timberdale.

"Mamma never had a wink of sleep last night, for thinking of the dreadful gale William must be in at sea. Your fancy misled you," went on Minty, calmly touching-up the cottage in her painting—and Tod looked as if he would like to beat her.

But it did really seem that William had not come, and we took our departure. I don't think I had ever seen Tod look so puzzled.

"I wish I may be shot if I can understand this!" said he.

"Could we have been mistaken in thinking it was Brook?" I was beginning; and Tod turned upon me savagely.

"I swear it was Brook. There! And you know it as well as I, Mr. Johnny. Where can he be hiding himself? What is the meaning of it?"

It is my habit always to try to account for things that seem unaccountable; to search out reasons and fathom them; and you would be surprised at the light that will sometimes crop up. An idea flashed across me now.

"Can Brook be ill, Tod, think you?—done up with his voyage, or something—and St. George is nursing him at his house for a day or two before he shows himself to Timberdale?" And Tod thought it might be so.

Getting back to Mr. Delorane's, we found him and the Squire sitting at the table still. St. George, just come in, was standing by, hat in hand, and they were both tackling him at once.

"*What* do you say?" asked St. George of his master, when he got room for a word. "That I brought William Brook home here last night from Worcester! Why, what can have put such a thing into your head, sir?"

"*Didn't* you bring him?" cried the Squire. "Didn't you drive him home in your gig?"

"That I did not. I have not seen William Brook."

He spoke in a ready, though surprised tone, not at all like one who is shuffling with the truth, or telling a fable, and looked from one to another of his two questioners, as if not yet understanding them. The Squire pushed his spectacles to the top of his brow and stared at St. George. He did not understand, either.

"Look here, St. George: do you deny that it was you we passed in Dip Lane last night—and your grey horse—and your gig?"

"Why should I deny it?" quietly returned St. George. "I drew as close as I could to the hedge as a matter of precaution to let you go by, Squire, you were driving so quickly. And a fine shouting you greeted me with," he added, turning to Tod, with a slight laugh.

"The greeting was not intended for you; it was for William Brook," answered Tod, his voice bearing a spice of antagonism; for he thought he was being played with.

St. George was evidently at a loss yet, and stood in silence. All in a moment, his face lighted up.

"Surely," he cried impulsively, "you did not take that man in the gig for William Brook!"

"It was William Brook. Who else was it?"

"A stranger. A stranger to me and to the neighbourhood. A man to whom I gave a lift."

Tod's face presented a picture. Believing, as he did still, that it was Brook in the gig, the idea suggested by me—that St. George was concealing Brook at his house out of good-fellowship—grew stronger and stronger. But he considered that, as it had come to this, St. George ought to say so.

"Where's the use of your continuing to deny it, St. George?" he asked. "You had got Brook there, and you know you had."

"But I tell you that it was not Brook," returned St. George. "Should I deny it, if it had been he? You talk like a child."

"Has Brook been away so long that we shouldn't know him, do you suppose?" retorted quick-tempered Tod. "Why! as a proof that it was Brook, he shouted back his greeting to us, taking off his hat to wave it in answer to ours. Would a strange man have done that?"

"The man did nothing of the kind," said St. George.

"Yes, he did," I said, thinking it was time I spoke. "He called back a greeting to us, and he waved his hat round and round. I should not have felt so sure it was Brook but for seeing him without his hat."

"Well, I did not see him do it," conceded St. George. "When you began to shout in passing the man seemed surprised. 'What do those people want?' he said to me; and I told him you were acquaintances of mine. It never occurred to my mind, or to his either, I should imagine, but that the shouts were meant for me. If he did take off his hat in response, as you say, he must have done it, I reckon, because I did not take off mine."

"Couldn't you hear our welcome to him? Couldn't you hear us call him 'Brook'?" persisted Tod.

"I did not distinguish a single word. The wind was too high for that."

"Then we are to understand that Brook has not come back; that you did not bring him?" interposed the Squire. "Be quiet, Joe; can't you see you were mistaken? I told you you were, you know at the time. You and Johnny are for ever taking up odd notions, Johnny especially."

"The man was a stranger to me," spoke St. George. "I overtook him trudging along the road, soon after leaving Worcester; it was between Red Hill and the turning to Whittington. He accosted me, asking which of the two roads before us would take him to Evesham. I told him which, and was about to drive on when it occurred to me

that I might as well offer to give the man a lift: it was an awful evening, and that's the truth: one that nobody would, as the saying runs, turn a dog out in. He thanked me, and got up; and I drove him as far as ——"

"Then that's what took you round by Dip Lane, St. George?" interrupted Mr. Delorane.

"That's what took me round by Dip Lane," acquiesced St. George, slightly smiling; "and which seems to have led to this misapprehension. But don't give my humanity more credit than it deserves. Previously to this I had been debating in my own mind whether to take the round, seeing what a journey was before me. It was about the wildest night I ever was out in, the horse could hardly make head against the wind, and I thought we might feel it less in the small and more sheltered by-ways than in the open road. The taking up the traveller decided me."

"You put him down in Dip Lane, at the turning that leads to Evesham," remarked the Squire.

"Yes, I put him down there. It was just after you passed us. He thanked me heartily, and walked on; and I drove quickly home, glad enough to reach it. Who he was, or what he was, I do not know, and did not ask."

Tod was still in a quandary; his countenance betrayed it. "Did you notice that he resembled William Brook, St. George?"

"No. It did not strike me that he resembled anyone. His face was well wrapped up from the cold, and I did not get a clear view of it: I am not sure that I should know it again. I should know his voice, though," he added quickly.

Poor Aunt Hester, listening to all this in dismay, felt the disappointment keenly: the tears were stealing down her face. "And we have been drinking his health, and—and feeling so thankful that he was safely back again!" she murmured gently.

"Hang it, yes," added Mr. Delorane. "Well, well; I daresay a day or two more will bring him. I must say I thought it odd that you should not have mentioned it to me, St. George, if he had come."

"I should have thought it very odd, sir," spoke St. George.

"Will you take a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you; I have not time for it. Those deeds have to be gone over, you know, sir, before post time," replied St. George; and he left the room.

"And if ever you two boys serve me such a trick again—bringing me over with a cock-and-bull story that people have come back from sea who haven't—I'll punish you," stuttered the Squire, too angry to speak clearly.

We went away in humility; heads down, metaphorically speaking, tails between legs. The Squire kept up the ball, firing away sarcastic reproaches hotly.

Tod never answered. The truth was, he felt angry himself. Not

with the Squire, but with the affair altogether. Tod hated mystification, and the matter was mystifying him utterly. With all his heart, with all the sight of his eyes, he had believed it to be William Brook: and he could not drive the conviction away, that it was Brook, and that St. George was giving him house-room.

"I don't like complications," spoke he resentfully.

"Complications!" retorted the Squire. "What complications are there in this? None. You two lads must have been thinking of William Brook, perhaps speaking of him, and so you thought you saw him. That's all about it, Joe."

The complications were not at an end. A curious addition to them was at hand. The Squire came to a halt at the turning to the Ravine, undecided whether to betake himself home at once, or to make a call first at Timberdale Court, to see Robert Ashton.

"I think we'll go there, lads," said he: "there's plenty of time. I want to ask him how that squabble about the hunting arrangements has been settled."

So we continued our way along the road, presently crossing it to take the one in which the Court was situated: a large handsome house, lying back on the right hand. Before gaining it, however, we had to pass the pretty villa rented by Mr. St. George, its stable and coach-house and dog-kennel beside it. The railway was on ahead; a train was shrieking itself at that moment into the station.

St. George's groom and man-of-all-work, Japhet, was sweeping up the leaves on the little lawn. Tod, who was in advance of us, put his arms on the gate. "Are you going to make a bonfire with them?" asked he.

"There's enough for't, sir," answered Japhet. "I never see such a wind as yesterday's," he ran on, dropping his besom to face Tod, for the man was a lazy fellow, always ready for a gossip. "I'm sure I thought it 'ud ha' blowed the trees down as well as the leaves."

"It was pretty strong," assented Tod, as I halted beside him, and the Squire walked on towards the Court. "We were out in it—coming home from Pigeon Green. There was one gust that I thought would have blown the horses right over."

"The master, he were out in it, too, a coming home from Worcester," cried Japhet, taking off his old hat to push his red hair back. "When he got in here, he said as he'd had enough on't for one journey. I should think the poor horse had too; his coat were all wet."

Tod lifted up his head, speaking impulsively. "Was your master alone, Japhet, when he got home? Had he anyone with him?"

"Yes, he were all alone, sir," replied the man. "Miss Delorane were with him when he drove off in the morning, but she stayed at Worcester."

Had Tod taken a moment for thought he might not have asked the question. He had nothing of the sneak in him, and would have

scorned to pump a servant about his master's movements. The answer tended to destroy his theory of Brook's being concealed here, and to uphold the account given by Mr. St. George.

Quitting the railings, we ran to catch up the Squire. And at that moment two or three railway passengers loomed into view, coming from the train. One of them was Ellin Delorane.

She came along briskly, with a buoyant step and a smiling face. The Squire dropped us a word of caution.

"Now don't go telling her of your stupid fancy about Brook, you two: it would only cause her disappointment." And with the last word we met her.

"Ah ha, Miss Ellin!" he exclaimed, taking her hands. "And so the truant's back again!"

"Yes, he is back again," she softly whispered, with a blush that was deep in colour.

The Squire did not quite catch the words. She and he were at cross-purposes. "We have but now left your house, my dear," he continued. "Your aunt does not expect you back to-day; she thought you would stay at Worcester till Saturday."

Ellin smiled shyly. "Have you seen him?" she asked in the same soft whisper.

"Seen whom, my dear?"

"Mr. Brook."

"Mr. Brook! Do you mean *William* Brook? He is not back, is he?"

"Yes, he is back," she answered. "I thought you might have seen him: you spoke of the return of the truant."

"Why, child, I meant you," explained the Squire. "Nobody else. Who says William Brook is back?"

"Oh, I say it," returned Ellin, her cheeks all rosy dimples. "He reached Worcester yesterday."

"And where is he now?" cried the Squire, feeling a little at sea.

"He is here, at Timberdale," answered Ellin. "Mr. St. George drove him home last night."

"There!" cried Tod with startling emphasis. "There, father, please not to disparage my sight any more."

Well, what do you think of this for another complication? It took me aback. The Squire rubbed his face, and stared.

"My dear, just let us understand how the land lies," said he, putting his hand on Ellin's shoulder. "Do you say that William Brook reached Worcester yesterday on his return, and that St. George drove him home here at night?"

"Yes," replied Ellin. "Why should you doubt it? It is true."

"Well, we thought St. George did drive him home," was the Squire's answer, staring into her face; "we passed his gig in Dip Lane and thought that it was Brook that he had with him. But St. George denies this. He says it was not Brook; that he has not

seen Brook, does not know he has come home ; he says the man he had with him was a stranger, to whom he was giving a lift."

Ellin looked grave for a moment ; then the smiles broke out again.

"St. George must have been joking," she cried ; "he cannot mean it. He happened to be at Worcester station yesterday when Mr. Brook arrived by the Birmingham train : we suppose he then offered to drive him home. Anyway, he did do it."

"But St. George denies that he did, Ellin," I said.

"He will not deny it to me, Johnny. Gregory West, returning from a visit to some client at Spetchley, met them in the gig together."

The Squire listened like a man dazed. "I can't make head or tail of it," cried he. "What does St. George mean by denying that he brought Brook ?—And where *is* Brook ?"

"Has nobody seen him ?" questioned Ellin.

"Not a soul, apparently. Ellin, my girl," added the Squire, "we will walk back with you to your father's, and get this cleared up. Come along, boys."

So back we went to turn the tables upon St. George, Tod in a rapture of gratification. You might have thought he was treading upon eggs.

We had it out this time in Mr. Delorane's private office ; the Squire walked straight into it. Not but that "having it out" must be regarded as a figure of speech, for elucidation seemed farther off than before, and the complications greater.

Mr. Delorane and his head clerk were both bending over the same parchment when we entered. Ellin kissed her father, and turned to St. George.

"Why have you been saying that you did not drive home William Brook ?" she asked as they shook hands.

"A moment, my dear ; let me speak," interrupted the Squire, who never believed anybody's explanation could be so lucid as his own. "Delorane, I left you just now with an apology for having brought to you a cock-and-bull story through the misleading fancies of these boys ; but we have come back again to tell you the story's true. Your daughter here says that it was William Brook that St. George had in his gig. And perhaps Mr. St. George"—giving that gentleman a sharp nod—"will explain what he meant by denying it ?"

"I denied it because it was not he," said Mr. St. George, not appearing to be in the least put out. "How can I tell you it was Brook when it was not Brook ? If it had been——"

"You met William Brook at the Worcester railway station yesterday afternoon," interrupted Ellin. "Mrs. James Ashton saw you there ; saw the meeting. You *were* at the station, were you not ?"

"I was at the station," readily replied St. George, "and Mrs. James Ashton may have seen me there, for all I know—I did not see her. But she certainly did not see William Brook. Or, if she did, I didn't."

"Gregory West saw you and him in your gig together later, when you were leaving Worcester," continued Ellin. "It was at the top of Red Hill."

St. George shook his head. "The person I had in my gig was a stranger. Had Gregory West come up one minute earlier he would have seen me take the man into it."

"William *has* come," persisted Ellin.

"I don't say he has not," returned St. George. "All I can say is that I did not know he had come and that I have not seen him."

Who was right, and who was wrong? Any faces more hopelessly puzzled than the two old gentlemen's were, as they listened to these contradictory assertions, I'd not wish to see. Nothing came of the interview; nothing but fresh mystification. Ellin declared William Brook had arrived, had been driven out of Worcester for Timberdale in St. George's gig. We felt equally certain we had passed them in Dip Lane, sitting together in the gig, but St. George denied it in toto, affirming that the person with him was a stranger.

And perhaps it may be as well if I here say a word about the routes. Evesham lay fifteen miles from Worcester; Timberdale not much more than half that distance, in a somewhat different direction, and on a different road. In going to Timberdale, if when about half way there you quitted the high road for by-ways you would come to Dip Lane. Traversing nearly the length of the lane, you would then come to a by-way leading from it on the other side, which would bring you on the direct road to Evesham, still far off. Failing to take this by-way leading to Evesham, you would presently quit the lane, and by dint of more by-ways would gain again the high road and soon come to Timberdale. This is the route that Mr. St. George took that night.

We went home from Mr. Delorane's, hopelessly mystified, the Squire rubbing up his hair the wrong way; now blowing us both up for what he called our "fancies" in supposing we saw William Brook, and now veering round to the opposite opinion that we and Ellin must be alike correct in saying Brook had come.

Ellin's account was this: She passed a pleasant morning with Mary West, who was nearly always more or less of an invalid. At half past one o'clock dinner was served; Philip West, his younger brother Gregory, who had recently joined him, and Mr. St. George coming in from the office to partake of it. Dinner over, they left the room, having no time to linger. In fact, Gregory rose from table before he had well finished. Mary West inquired what his haste was, and he replied that he was off to Spetchley; some one had been taken ill there and wanted a will made. It was Philip who ought to have gone, who had been sent for; but Philip had an hour or two's business yet to do with Mr. St. George. Mrs. West told St. George that she would have tea ready at five o'clock, that he might drink a cup before starting for home.

Later on in the afternoon, when Ellin and Mrs. West were sitting over the fire, talking of things past and present, and listening to the howling of the wind, growing more furious every hour, James Ashton's wife came in, all excitement. Her husband, in medical practice at Worcester, was the brother of Robert Ashton of Timberdale. A very nice young woman was Marianne Ashton, but given to an excited manner. Taking no notice of Mrs. West, she flew to Ellin and began dancing round her like a demented Red Indian squaw.

"What will you give me for my news, Ellin?"

"Now, Marianne!" remonstrated Mrs. West. "Do be sensible, if you can."

"Be quiet, Mary: I am sensible. Your runaway lover is come, Ellin; quite safely."

They saw by her manner, heard by her earnest tone, that it was true. William Brook had indeed come, was then in the town. Throwing off her bonnet, and remarking that she meant to remain for tea, Mrs. James Ashton sat down to tell her story soberly.

"You must know that I had to go up to the Shrub Hill station this afternoon," began she, "to meet the Birmingham train. We expected Patty Silvester in by it; and James has been since a most unearthly hour this morning with some cross-grained patient, who must needs go and be ill at the wrong time. I went up in the brougham, and had hardly got on the platform when the train came in. There was a good deal of confusion; there always is, you know; passengers getting out and getting in. I ran about looking for Patty, and found she had not come: taken fright at the weather I suppose. As the train cleared off, I saw a figure that seemed familiar to me; it was William Brook; and I gave a glad shriek that you might have heard on the top of St. Andrew's spire. He was crossing the line with others who had alighted, a small black leather travelling bag in his hand. I was about to run over after him, when a porter stopped me, saying a stray engine was on the point of coming up, to take on the Malvern train. So, all I could do was to stand there, hoping he would turn his head and see me. Well: just as he reached the opposite platform, Mr. St. George stepped out of the station-master's office, and I can tell you there was some shaking of hands between the two. There's my story."

"And where is he now?"

"Oh, they are somewhere together, I suppose; on their way here perhaps," rejoined Mrs. James Ashton carelessly. "I lost sight of them: that ridiculous stray engine the man spoke of puffed up at the minute, and stopped right in front of me. When it puffed on again, leaving the way clear, both he and St. George had vanished. So I got into the brougham to bring you the news in advance, lest the sudden sight of William the deserter should cause a fainting fit."

Ellin, unable to control herself, burst into glad tears of relief. "You don't know what a strain it has been," she said. And she sat

listening for his step on the stairs. But William Brook did not come.

At five o'clock punctually the tea was brought in, and waited for some little time on the table. Presently Mr. West appeared. When they told him he was late, he replied that he had lingered in the office expecting Mr. St. George. St. George had left him some time before to go to the Shrub Hill station, having business to see to there, and had promised to be back by tea-time. However, he was not back yet. Mr. West was very glad to hear of the arrival of William Brook, and supposed St. George was then with him.

Before the tea was quite over, Gregory West got back from Spetchley. He told them that he had met St. George just outside the town, and that he had a gentleman in his gig. He, Gregory West, who was in his brother's gig, pulled up to ask St. George whether he was not going home earlier than he had said. Yes, somewhat, St. George called back, without stopping: when he had seen what sort of a night it was going to be, he thought it best to be off as soon as he could.

"Of course it was William Brook that he had with him, Gregory!" exclaimed Mary West, forgetting that her brother-in-law had never seen William Brook.

"I cannot tell," was the only answer the young lawyer could give. "It was a stranger to me: he wore a lightish-coloured overcoat and a white comforter."

"That's he," said Mrs. James Ashton. "And he had on new tan-coloured kid gloves: I noticed them. I think St. George might have brought him here, in spite of the roughness of the night. He is jealous, Ellin."

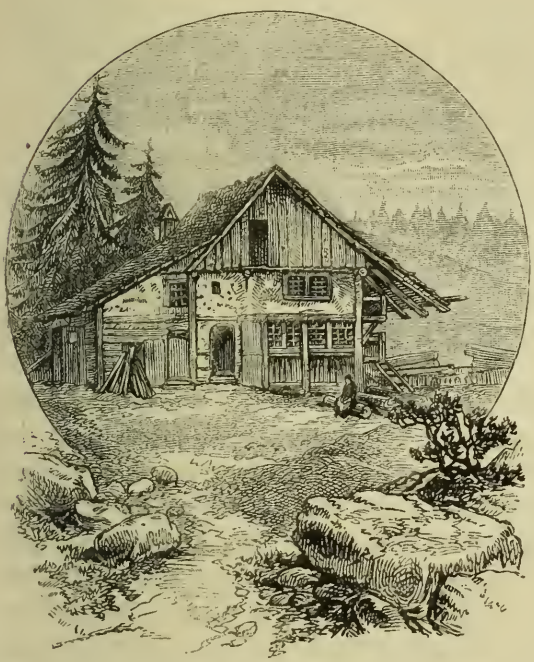
They all laughed. But never a shadow of doubt rested on any one of their minds that St. George was driving William Brook home to Timberdale. And we, as you have heard, saw him, or thought we saw him, in Dip Lane.

And for the particulars of Mr. St. George's counter-statement, and other remarkable statements, we must wait for the next and concluding paper.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

# IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.



Black Forest Hut.

At nine o'clock one morning, with blue skies and a prospect of fair weather; with shadows shortening and disappearing as the sun ran his upward course; I started for Triberg, a three or four days' drive from Baden. A landau drawn by a stout pair of horses had been placed at my disposal, but as it was what is called a return carriage, the sum charged was considerably less than it would otherwise have been. The landlord of the Hotel Victoria had struck the bargain with the coachman, and arranged matters with his usual kindness. It would indeed be difficult to say too much in favour of the courtesy and attention of Herr Grosholz towards his guests.

The only mistake made—and one to be deplored—was that, instead of at the outset taking the way by the exquisite valley of the Murg, the coachman drove straight through the flat, uninteresting high road to Achern. This occupies about three hours, and is perhaps the most dismal bit of road in the whole of the Black Forest. Fortunately, I had already explored some portion of the Murgthal, but the beauty of what I had seen only made me regret the more what we had now passed over.

For there are lovely views to be found in the valley of the Murg—some of the finest in the Black Forest. Take for instance the view from the New Castle of Eberstein—a wonderfully pleasant drive from Baden, through a road that winds up into forests and down into hollows; taking you into the heart of the woods; buried out of sight and sound of all human life and habitation; yielding the very utmost enjoyment of the fresh pure delight of these sylvan retreats and solitudes as you are drawn swiftly through the air by strong, willing horses; whilst the scent of the pines comes over you in faint, delicious

wafts, and the rustle and murmur of the trees make music for you as you journey.

It was after such a drive that the view suddenly burst upon me just outside the gateway of the Castle of Eberstein. An immense, fertile valley stretched before one, through which the Murg wound its rapid, white, frothy, shallow course. The slopes on which stood the castle were in part cleared and cultivated, in part still given up to the pines and their sombre verdure. For whilst it is refreshing to be in the midst of the pine forests, undoubtedly they have a melancholy influence when looked upon from a distance.

In the valley, on the borders of the stream, great saw mills were at work, and it is pleasant to enter these mills and watch primitive machinery doing its labour, and revel in the pine scent the sawdust so prodigally throws out. Small villages were dotted about; and opposite, rose other pine hills, until the ranges seemed to meet and close in the scene. To the left stretched the valley of the Rhine, bounded in the far distance by the soft and graceful undulations of the Vosges mountains.

The castle itself was worth inspection. A half courtyard, half garden with old-fashioned flowers formed a picturesque entrance within the gates: and the old armour, the stained glass, the curiosities, ending with the ancient pictures in the oratory, the polished floors and low, wainscotted rooms with their subdued lights, all sent one for the time being into a glorious mediæval age, where all was quaint, bold and vigorous: an age of sunflowers and æstheticism, perhaps, but manly and earnest; and guiltless of all the effeminate absurdity that has distinguished the movement of a later age—and must soon cease to be.

Above all, the view from the windows was glorious, framed as it was by the old-fashioned windows which opened to it from all sides of the castle. Terraces of flowers brightened the slopes immediately beneath; and still lower, the vineyards spread their green leaves, suggesting ideas of rich and ruby cups, and sparkling wine, and a hospitality that should be freely given by all who have freely received.

A young bride and bridegroom—the former one of the loveliest and most graceful girls I had ever seen: both of them the very types for this beautiful old place—joined me in the inspection under the guidance of a youthful and singularly civil housekeeper — a very different character from the quaint, original old woman who had taken us through the cold, creepy dungeons of the New Castle of Baden. This happy pair, I think, threw an extra glamour and romance over the building by their devotion to each other, which was as chivalrous as ever could have been the devotion of any one of the knights who, in ancient days, had worn the armour that surrounded us. One enjoyed and entered into their unmistakable happiness—for what is life worth if it is not gilded by a ready sympathy with the joys and sorrows of our fellow pilgrims?

It was all this, and more, that the coachman had shirked in taking the short cut to Achern.

The landlord of the inn at Achern said this was a source of frequent complaint. The coachmen would avoid the Murgthal when they possibly could, and when travellers were not on their guard. But it is difficult to be on your guard against an unknown evil. As in this instance, the discovery comes too late to be remedied. They are very fond also of shirking the Mummelsee. All this saves a day's journey, whilst the full price has usually been charged. Let everyone, therefore, expressly stipulate for the Murgthal and the Mummelsee.

Allerheiligen was to be the first day's destination, and now, at Achern, I found that it was impossible for the horses to do the Mummelsee, and also to reach Allerheiligen that evening. The distance would be too much for them. The coachman, as usual, had intended to shirk the lake. This, at least, could be remedied, but only by taking another carriage at Achern, and arranging for the Baden coachman to meet me at the point where the roads for Allerheiligen and the Mummelsee met at right angles.

So in this second conveyance I started for the Mummelsee, and mentally registered two resolutions. Primo: as this was the first time I had ever taken a return carriage, so it should be the last. Secondo: that in future all arrangements and agreements should be so clearly defined as to render any mistake or misunderstanding impossible.

The road, as far as Achern, had been dreary and monotonous in the extreme: now all this was changed. At once we entered again into the region of the eternal mountains, clad with their endless pines. As we clattered through the small town of Achern, the people came to their doors and windows to see who thus woke the echoes of their "calm and cool retreats." They were all dressed in their best; for, reader, it was Sunday. If you quarrel with the confession, I cannot help it. Truth must out. I can only admit that I would rather it had been Saturday or Monday; that in all cases, where it is possible, Sunday should be kept as a day of rest both for man and beast. But abroad, if anywhere, the old saying that "in Rome you must do as Rome does" is not of infrequent application. Circumstances in part control our actions and determine our course, and we have to bend to them. I do not refer to matters simply of amusement, such as visiting a theatre on a Sunday, or attending a ball. This must be at all times optional, and he who transgresses settles the matter with his own conscience—if he can. But in the ordinary circumstances, the necessities, the every-day routine of life abroad, there are times when Sunday cannot be observed absolutely after the manner of our English ideas.

Roadside cottages enlivened our way. A Sabbath calm seemed to fill the air, even in this land, where Sunday is rather a day of rejoicing and recreation, feasting and merrymaking, pleasure parties and excur-

sions, than a day devoted to religion. The coachman, too, had put on his Sunday's best; but he had passed his meridian, and the maidens no longer looked after him as they had probably looked after him twenty years ago; when, judging by what remained, he must have been a vigorous and handsome youth.

He whipped up his horses, and presently we came to the inn where the road to the Mummelsee branched off to the left. Here, resting a few moments, I found the landlord young, handsome, intelligent, and enterprising, and doing his best to learn English with the help of an English lady who had settled in the village: dangerous occupation, if the lady was fair and fascinating.

We continued our way. The road narrowed, and for a time took upon itself almost the likeness of an English lane. The surrounding scenery was varied and beautiful. Distant mountains opposed our progress. Vast pine forests stretched away and away, in which, apparently, a man might lose himself and wander about for ever. But immediately around us the landscape was more open, somewhat more sylvan and rural: "a valley laughing with green pastures and running streams."

After a time we came to an inn at the foot of the mountain. Here, rather than give the horses more work—and also because a climb through the wood would be far pleasanter—we left the carriage, and the coachman set out with me towards the Mummelsee: a lake some distance up the height.

Wild and weird enough was the way, as we left the ordinary path and plunged boldly into the midst of brambles and ferns, wild flowers and wild fruit. The guide who accompanied me—more for pleasure than because his services were necessary—seemed to know every inch of the ground, and enjoyed the fun as much as a schoolboy. Before he had gone a hundred yards or so his jacket was off, and his white shirt-sleeves stood out in cool contrast with the sombre pines.

Yet the way was anything but sombre. The sun overhead shot down its rays, throwing lights and shadows across our path, and destroying all sense of gloom. Through the trees we caught glimpses of a blue sky, pure and deep as a sapphire, that, in conjunction with the fresh breeze blowing, raised our spirits to the point of exhilaration; that nameless, peculiar sense of happiness that creeps over one amidst such scenes, and such scenes only.

There was a solemnity, if you will, about the wood and the walk; a sense of majesty and grandeur and illimitable power inseparable from all vast expanses, such as the sky, the sea, a great mountain, an apparently boundless forest. But the gloom and sadness would only enfold this wood with the setting of the sun, when the shadows would be lost in the darkness, and the desolation of night took the place of all that was now bright and beautiful.

The guide, despite his middle age, skipped about like a wild cat, now disappearing for a moment, and now suddenly returning with a

branch of wild raspberries, rich, ripe, large, luscious, such as I had never seen before, never expect to see again. These he presented with an air and a grace that is born with a good many of these men: that in their station of life comes neither from cultivation nor observation, and to the Englishman of corresponding rank comes never at all. For himself, he did not care for the wild raspberries: his weakness was bilberries, which grew large too, and abundant, but, reader, were not half so good.

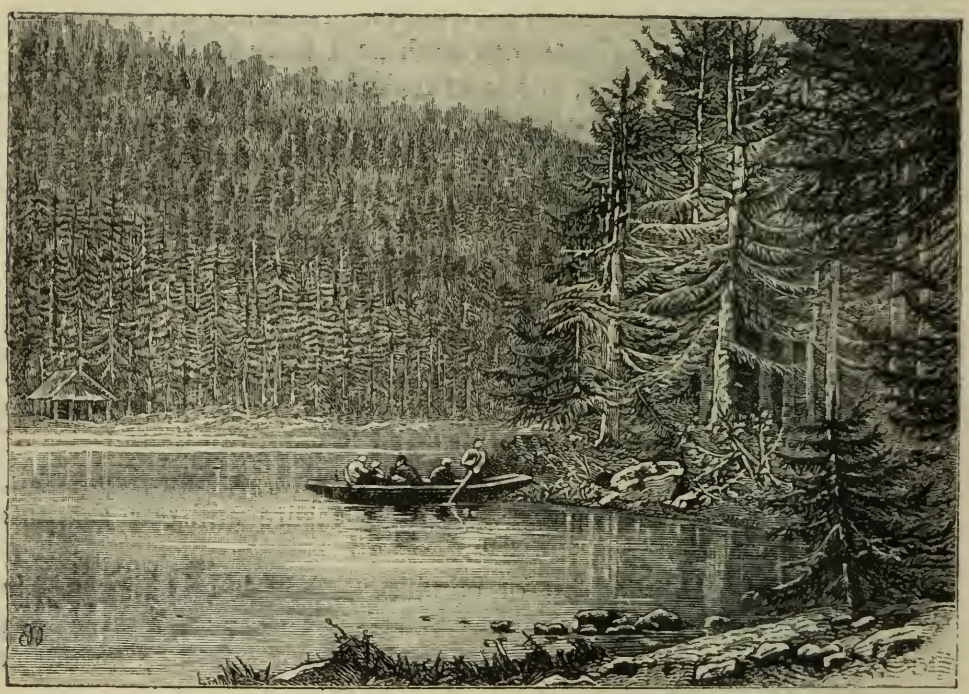
The scent of the pines accompanied us on our upward scramble, and, beneath our feet, a carpet more beautiful than any that ever came from a weaver's loom. Innumerable wild flowers and ferns and delicate shrubs spread their store. But still the birds sang not, nor flew from bough to bough, nor fluttered in their nests. No chirp or whistle, no long-drawn notes; no raving songs such as I have heard in Alpine groves, where, day and night, floods of melody never ceased—no, not for a moment—from the rapturous throats of the nightingales and the exquisite note of the blackcap. There is a certain old Alpine château, sleeping far above the plain of the Isère, and looking down upon the vast valley, and the sleeping village, and the flowing river, and confronting the opposite range of gigantic hills: a certain old château, with its groves and gardens, dear to the memory of days that never, never can return. I have listened hour after hour, week after week, to an unbroken flood of music from these feathered songsters, that died away only with the spring: a constant, never-ending stream of melody, that those who have not passed beyond the boundaries of a northern clime can never dream of, or realise, or imagine. Oh, memory! memory! at once our greatest pleasure and our sharpest pain!

At length, after a good bit of climbing—though climbing within the capacities of the most ordinary walker—we reached something like table-land, and soon came to the lake that reposes so far out of the world, so far above it.

Dark, gloomy, and sombre it looked to-day, in spite of a brilliant sky. Dark, gloomy, and sombre pines fringed it all around, and cast their shadows upon the water, which looked cruel, yea, hungering for a victim. In this land of legends, and wild superstitions, and stories of the supernatural, there is no more favoured spot than the Mummelsee ("Fairy lake," by interpretation), for the arena, if the term may be applied, of marvellous tales and tragedies, the haunts and the deeds of a race other than man. Fays and fairies, goblins and ghouls, imps and vampires, hold revels here, and work their spells, and enchant the unwary. Enchant them in the literal sense of the word; not as beauty attracts its votaries, but as the snake its victim.

But the tales and legends of the Mummelsee are for the most part of evil omen and unhappy termination; terrible and portentous, as befits the aspect of the lake and its desolate situation. Cavaliers lured to their destruction; men, young and handsome, whose hearts

have been won by the fays, then deliberately broken, until the victims have lost their beauty, grown wan and pale, and passed away into spectre-land, silently as one of its inhabitants ; pursued to their death by a fate cruel and persistent ; dying, yet making no sign. One tradition has it, that a fairy would bewitch her lover, lure him to her realms ; there he would live happily, until, in a fatal hour, he betrayed the secret of his love. In a moment a small dart stabbed him to the heart ; from the depths of the lake would rise a wild despairing cry, that floated far into space over the tops of melancholy pines which seemed to rustle and sigh in mournful sorrow and sympathy—and a red tinge, the life-blood of the victim, would rise and spread itself on the surface of the water.

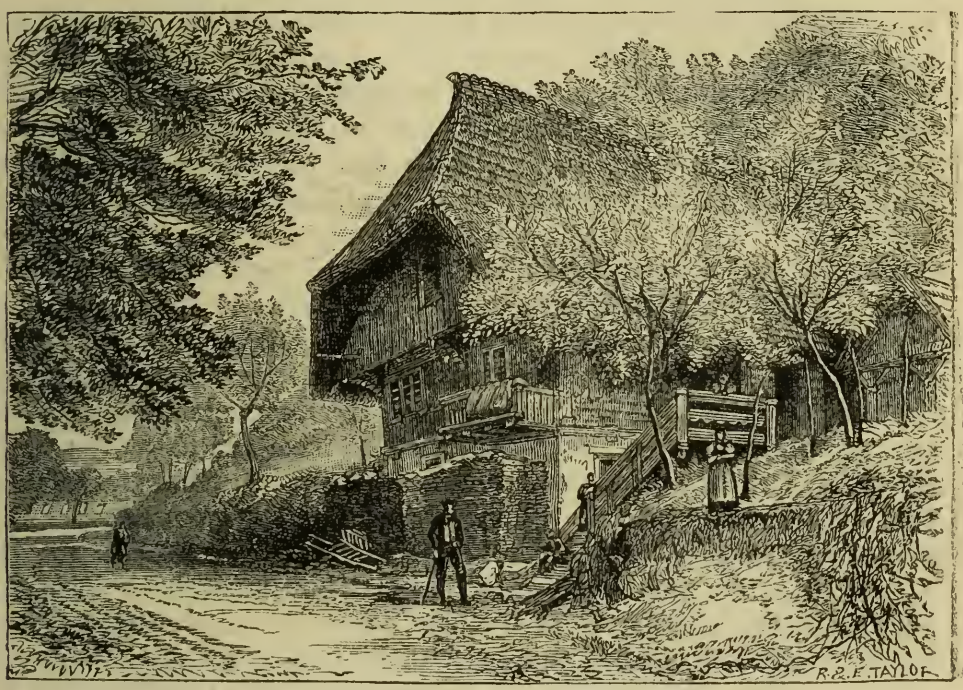


THE MUMMELSEE.

Cold and cruel, dark and green, the waters looked to-day. The lake is not large, but its remote situation, its wild aspect, its unbroken setting of fir trees, its absolute solitude and desolation, throw their weird influence upon the spectator and encompass him with a spell. Of the few lakes in the Black Forest, it is, in consequence, the most interesting and romantic, the one least to be neglected. The other lakes are found in the ordinary way side, sea-level experience ; and though interesting, perhaps beautiful after their kind, they are at best insignificant and of small reputation. The Mummelsee has a distinct individuality of its own, both as to aspect and position. It has one more feature to enhance its charms—it is found only after a certain amount of climbing and hard work. We know how it is in human nature to set store by that which is attained with

labour and toil, and to lightly esteem what has been lightly gained. A trite saying it may be, but, alas for mankind, a very true one.

There was a solitary hut on the borders of the lake, where of course all sorts of wines, beer and spirits were dispensed, including the inevitable kirschwasser, which is to be found all over the Black Forest: excellent when good — a somewhat rare occurrence: abominably bad when inferior. Twice only I tasted in this national decoction the true flavour of the cherry, when it was asked for in this "promiscuous" or wandering fashion: and one of these occasions was in the Albthal, at the little half-way inn where the diligence stopped ten minutes to rest the horses. Perhaps, to be quite just, I ought also to state that only once did I find the kirschwasser so




ON THE ROAD TO ALLERHEILIGEN.

terrible that I thought I was poisoned for good and all, and gave myself up for lost. This, too, by a strange coincidence, was in the Albthal, on a return journey, but at another road-side inn.

At the hut we found a boat, and a youth ready to paddle us about the lake, if we possessed courage equal to a possible encounter with the ghouls and fairies that inhabited its depths. Our spirits answering to the strain, we soon found ourselves quietly rowing about, taking in from the centre of the water all surrounding points. Gloomy indeed were they, and sombre, whether we contemplated the water or the shore, or the pines that so sadly closed us in on all sides.

And as if to prove that fairies were indeed at work, suddenly a black cloud obscured our sky, a rushing wind took the surface of the lake, and went sighing and soughing through the trees, bending their

feathery tops, as if they were the plumes of a hearse about to assist at our funeral rites, whilst the blast sang a strain that sounded like a cruel requiem. It turned bitterly cold, and we, heated with walking, began to shiver and tremble, and to wonder if, after all, the spirits of the lake were at work and one more victim at least was sought for the sacrifice. My guide quickly donned his jacket; and to destroy all the romance and picturesqueness of the situation by stepping at one bound from the sublime to the ridiculous, he proceeded to envelop his head in a coloured pocket-handkerchief, as a precaution against toothache, to which he said he was a martyr.

The squall was as sudden as it was unexpected, and as distinctly unpleasant as either. The surface of the water was disturbed, and our boat rocked us a cradle song in which there was no soothing element; but the lake was too small to admit of real waves, or to suggest at any time the possibility of danger. Well that it was so, for our craft was a crazy old tub of strange, mysterious construction; we had to keep exactly balancing positions, and the slightest move to the right or left produced a lurch that threatened to send us to the fairies in a very summary, unsolicited, and possibly unwelcome condition.

But we landed in safety and rejoicing: and to restore circulation—I had almost said animation—sought the shelter of the hut and the restoring properties of kirschwasser. It was grateful as manna in the desert; and for once I blessed the inevitable restaurant (truly a *restaurant* in this instance) at the top of the mountain. (In Holland, par parenthèse, they even go so far as to have one half-way up the tower of Utrecht Cathedral, and thus agreeably combine religion with pleasure and profit. I never found an endeavour to make the best of both worlds carried quite so far as this anywhere else.)

To the guide, the strong waters of the hut must have been far pleasanter than the waters of the lake, for he bravely returned to the charge, and, I was glad to see, was himself again in a very few minutes. But he informed me in confidence that this spirit was an imitation kirschwasser, more palatable than the real thing, but less wholesome. To us, however, its healing properties were grateful and potent.

So, having recovered, we took our downward journey. Suddenly as the squall had come up, as suddenly it passed over, and warmth and sunshine once more accompanied our steps. It had been a singular coincidence. Had a storm been ordered to bring out the weird, wild, gloomy desolation of the Mummelsee, it could not have arrived more punctually or more à propos. Once more, I say, sunshine accompanied our steps—and rough and rapid they sometimes were. The guide enlivened the way by describing some of his excursions to the Mummelsee, and the curious people he had piloted. By this time, it is unnecessary to say, the handkerchief had been withdrawn, though the jacket kept its place.

"But often as I have been to the Mummelsee," said he, "never yet have I experienced so sudden a storm as we had to-day. Truly I wondered what was coming next, and whether the fairies at the bottom of the lake were brewing us mischief. How cold it was, too!" he added with a shiver. "I was not sorry to land."

"Do you then put faith in the evil spirits?" I asked.

"Yes and no," he replied with a laugh. "Our land is a very cradle of superstitious tales and legends. Our mothers rock us to sleep with them before we can take in their meaning. In childhood our minds are crammed with them, and at that period we believe all we hear. In manhood we try to shake off these impressions; but something of their influence will stick to us in spite of our reason. I am not sure that I should be very much surprised if I saw a fairy rise to the surface of the lake and charm me into the fatal plunge."

"At any rate," I said, "you would know what it meant and what to expect."

"Yes," he returned. "And—who can tell—the change might be for the better. Existence down there might have some charms; up here we work hard and get badly paid."

"Would you row across the lake at midnight?" I asked him out of curiosity; "or even approach it at that hour?"

"I think so," he answered, "but I have never been tried. I am not wanting in courage of that sort. But there are hundreds who would not venture near it after dark for all the wealth of the Duchy. If they did they would die of fright or go mad, and drown themselves in the water."

"That would come to very much the same thing as if the fairies themselves had accomplished the disaster."

"Yes," replied Jehu. "And you may be sure there would be plenty of people ready to believe it was supernatural work; and they would become more than ever convinced of the existence and evil influence of the water spirits."

He gathered bilberries and raspberries as he talked, reaching the inn with a handful of branches of the former, which he carefully stowed away to take home with him; declaring that his wife had a cunningly devised way of serving them up in a dish worth a king's ransom. I was sorry when the walk was over, and the forest and the lake, the wild flowers and the luscious fruit were all left behind. But time was passing, and if Allerheiligen was to be reached before nightfall (a consummation devoutly to be wished), there must be no further loitering on the road.

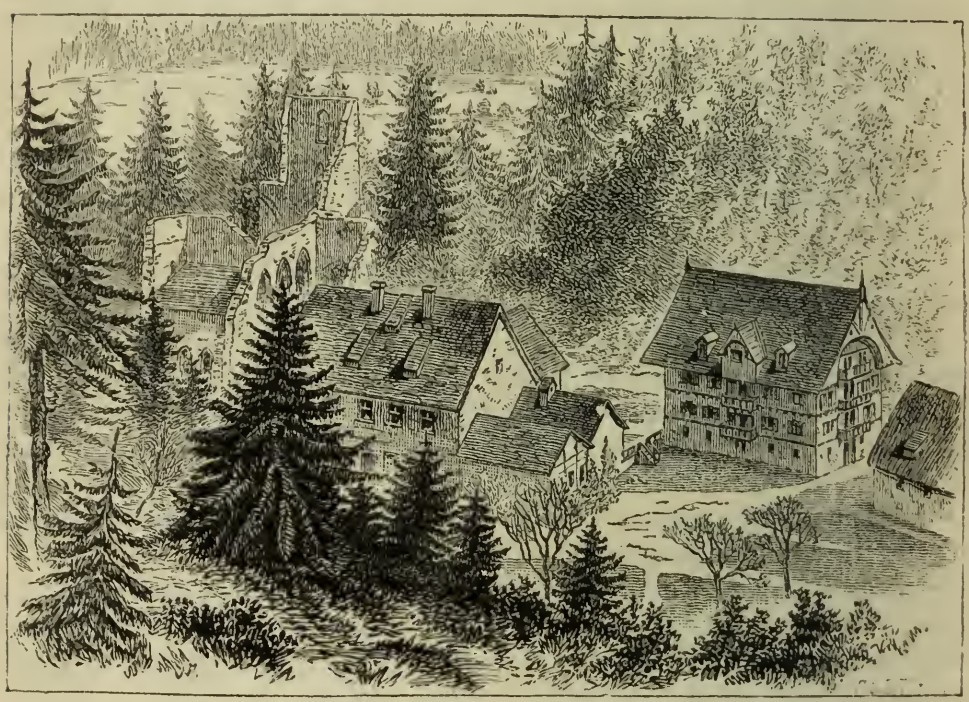
So the horses were put to, and Jehu took something for the good of the house, and was quite willing to bear my share of this burden in addition to his own. We left the young landlord flirting with two pretty girls who had just arrived, and were very much welcomed. He was equally dividing his favours, and evidently wondering on which of

the two laughing syrens his choice would eventually fall. Involuntarily the words occurred to me :

" Oh, pluck the rose of love the while
Life, joy and beauty on ye smile,
While loving ye are loved."

Probably he had never heard of Tasso, or the Garden of Armida, or the song of the bird ; but human nature is the same through all the ages ; and the thoughts that Tasso conceived in the 16th century as he vainly endeavoured to study law in dreary Padua, may be equally applied in the 19th. So the young landlord of the inn and his two pretty companions unconsciously found.

We left them behind, happy, contented, wanting nothing more,



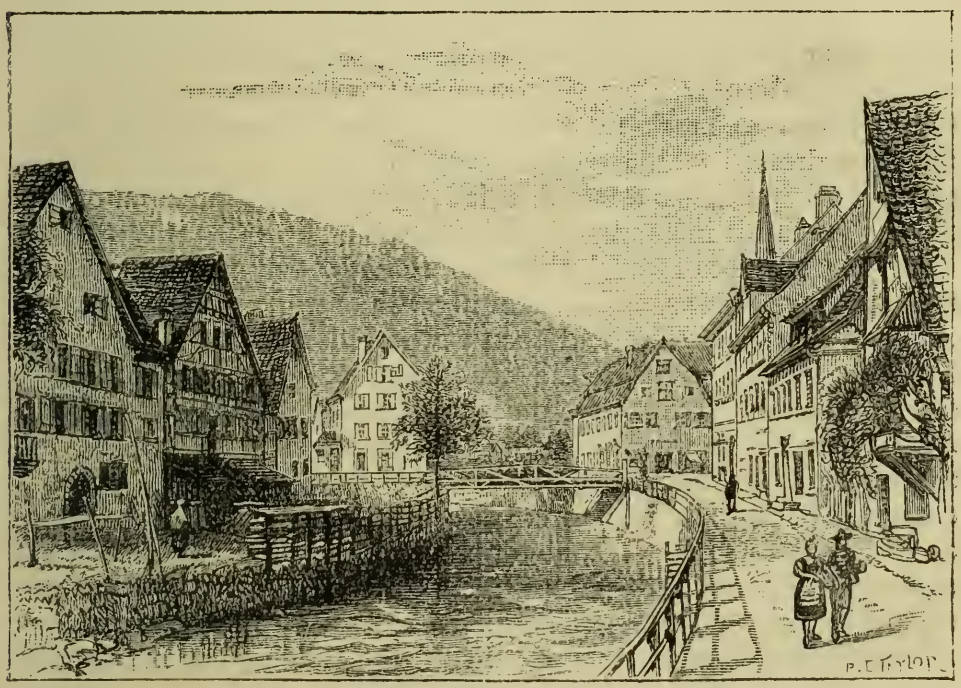
ALLERHEILIGEN.

nothing better than the pleasures of the passing hour ; tasting life with a careless enjoyment only they, and such as they, can experience : not wanting too much, and so not missing their grasp of life and happiness. Thrice happy mortals. As Julia Kavanagh has remarked in one of her pastoral, reflective stories, we have all of us, if the truth were known, played our stakes on the game of life and lost ; but these humble and contented beings, realising only the hour and the day, have played a very simple game and suffered comparatively little loss.

We returned the road we came (only on life's road is there no turning back), and Jehu, after his late somewhat unwonted gambols up and down the mountain, gave serious attention to his horses ; and I, like Harvey, fell into meditations which were abruptly put to flight by arriving at the inn where we had appointed to meet the carriage.

We were true to our time; it was not. So, to pass the minutes, the young landlord escorted me to the arbour, evidently to air and exercise his English; whilst I conscientiously praised his accent, the while I drank and praised his coffee. He spoke good French, too, which he had learned in Paris. Then up came the tardy carriage, and he wished me a happy journey, with a handshake that I yet feel, and shall ever remember; whilst the fat, very fat Pater—evidently the real lord and master of the establishment—looked on with evident and not undue pride at his son and successor. We turned our backs upon all this, and went on our way towards Allerheiligen.

And speaking of handshakes, par parenthèse, how much there is in the action; how different in varying individuals; how warmed and



HORNBERG.

chilled, attracted or repelled, you may be by a handshake. A whole chapter might be written upon the subject, full of subtle analysis and sage deductions; full of signs and tokens, and rules for application. I remember once reading a paper "On Street Door Knocks," pretending to read people's characters by their way of knocking. This seemed a somewhat uncertain test, and I wondered at the time what fine shades of distinction the writer would bring into single knocks or the postman's knock. But a handshake bears its own peculiar testimony to a man's character, just as much as the expression of the eyes or the mouth, or the tone of the voice.

We went our way towards Allerheiligen—a very glorious way, full of beauty and grandeur. The day was on the wane, and the afternoon shadows were lengthening. The coachman, full of contrition for having

shirked the Murgthal; or, to put it in his own words, "for not having known that I cared about seeing the Murgthal"—for I had had it out with him very seriously with the landlord at Achern, who made common cause with me against the practice—pointed out every spot of interest, posted me up in the name of every village, and gave me the history of every wayside house.

The backward views were magnificent, as we wound upwards into the forests. Far off mountains stretched away one behind another, and valleys and plains and villages lay sleeping below. But the trees soon overshadowed us and shut it all out, and the breeze stirred the pines with a sad melancholy sound. Great shadows cast by the declining sun stretched across our path. Much of the time we might have been winding up grand, well-kept avenues belonging to some ancient estate. To our right ran a narrow, shallow, babbling stream, frothing angrily over huge stones, running on for ever and for ever. Nature seems to mock man with its apparent immutability—man, vain man, dressed with so brief authority, who plays out his seven ages and disappears as a tale that is told, whilst the monarch of the forest is yet in his infancy.

Far up the slopes through the trees we had lovely glimpses; could trace the long shadows, and revel in a wealth of wild verdure; bracken, ferns and flowers. Now and then we passed a roadside inn, landmarks evidently known to the coachman, at which he cast long, lingering looks. Things were quiet this evening; doors were closed; nothing was in disorder. For all that could be seen stirring, the inns might have been deserted; probably were so, for the road was unfrequented and customers were few—especially on a Sunday evening. The inn-people were no doubt taking holiday, assembling at each other's houses, and making merry. The whole road was desolate and deserted; there was nothing but the trees and the shadows to bear us company; no sound to disturb the stillness but the running stream and the horses' feet as they beat the hard road, sending echoes up the slopes to play hide and seek amongst the trees. But this solitude has its charm.

Finally we reached the summit, and then began rapidly to descend into the valley by steep winding paths. Twilight was now falling. Great pine mountains on all sides stretched far above us, looking, in the gathering gloom, black as Erebus. We were descending, as it seemed, into the depths of the earth; gloom and desolation encompassed us. The air felt damp and cold: a mist was wreathing about some of the higher trees; yet the whole picture was inconceivably wild, grand and beautiful—for this descent into Allerheiligen, the situation of the place, the surrounding scene, is one of the finest things in the Black Forest.

At length the little settlement: a group of modern buildings side by side with an old ruin, mixing up together past and present in strange incongruous fashion. Nothing more lonely and desolate

could be conceived than the situation of Allerheiligen ("All Saints" by interpretation). Here, in one day, had the usual order of things been reversed; for whilst a lake is not generally found on the top of a mountain, and a monastery frequently buries itself far up some lonely height, the Mummelsee had been found only after hard climbing, and the monks of Allerheiligen had sheltered themselves in the depths of the earth. But, to do the old monks justice, they were as secluded, as retired from the world here, as they would have been perched upon some Alpine peak—whilst the situation was infinitely more depressing.

The monastery is said to have been founded in 1190 by the widow of the Count of Altdorf, brother of the Duke of Bavaria. After a wedded life of great unhappiness she bethought herself of founding a monastery, and the site was to be determined by an ass laden with bags of gold. Where the gold first touched the ground, there the monastery should be erected.

In this lovely and secluded spot the abbey rose. First, a small building; then, as it increased in wealth and strength, it extended to larger and yet larger dimensions. For centuries it was rich, famous, and sought after: by those unhappy men who had found the world too much for them, and were thankful to bury themselves in a living tomb—the dead alive, one might say; or by those novices who had not yet tried the world, and through mistaken zeal and fervour—the lofty aspiration and ideal which so often accompany youth, alas, so seldom outlive that period!—hoped to find their dreams realised in the daily round of monotonous duties, the exercise of a narrow and narrowing creed—and hoped in vain.

But—to pause one moment—why should our aspirations and ideals so seldom outlive the period of youth and romance? It is true, we seldom find our dreams realised in this world. Nay, the world does its best to disillusion and destroy what it cannot comprehend. As continual dropping wears away a stone, so contact with the world proves too much for most men who set out on the road of life with aims and hopes that world calls utopian, chimerical. Nevertheless, no matter how our dreams and ideals perish, as perish they will, it is well for a man, come what may, to keep before him an ideal standard which he feels sure exists, however seldom it is discovered. And he who has found even his one hero may be thankful, and go on his way rejoicing. It is not given to all men to see the longing of their soul satisfied.

For many centuries the monastery flourished. Then there came a time when monasteries were abolished; and finally, in 1803, the Abbey of Allerheiligen was struck by lightning and destroyed. It now remains a picturesque but not extensive ruin; a monument of departed glory; a wreck of wrecks—type of the lives it once sheltered.

It lies in a deep, narrow hollow or ravine. Closely, abruptly sur-

rounding it rise the lone hills clad to their summits with sombre pines. A spot more dreary and desolate need not be, in spite of its grandeur and beauty. To live a month, even a week in that place, would be to go hopelessly melancholy. With it all there was a feeling of unrest and disquiet. The stream rushes down and for ever rushes, filling all the air with its ceaseless murmur. No matter that the murmur does not rise to a roar, it is always there, day and night, summer and winter, in season and out of season. This, and the closely surrounding hills press down upon and seem to suffocate you; a weird sensation takes possession of you; some invisible influence in the air is working its spells; there is enchantment going on; the spirits of the dead-and-gone monks are about. Who or what is to exorcise them? I could not describe the effect Allerheiligen had upon me.

ALLERHEILIGEN.

The coachman cracked his whip in true German style as we swept into the courtyard — if the open space may be dignified by the term; the landlord came out with empressement as the carriage drew up with a flourish. Mine host had a keen eye to business, and was glad to welcome an addition to his list of visitors. Next I was piloted across the road to the other portion of the settlement, and given a room which looked on to the pine slopes, where the stream beat its ceaseless babble upon the brain.

Before daylight quite faded I went down to look at the waterfall which makes Allerheiligen famous, and of which much is said. I soon found that, far down as the ruin and the settlement seemed, there was a yet lower depth beyond. The valley narrowed into a cleft as I walked, and seemed about to close in. Soon an extra rush and roar told me I was approaching the cataract, and in a few moments I stood above a zig-zag waterfall that fell in numerous and picturesque

cascades over a bed of rocks. Had the volume of water been greater, so in proportion would have been the effect; but it was just now even smaller than usual. Very pretty, but not by any means sublime.

The situation of the fall is wild and romantic in the extreme, and the rocky heights on either side seem to guard it with angry jealousy. Zig-zag ladders conduct you to the bottom, and sundry rustic bridges span the chasm. The cataract finally empties itself in a small basin, and then flows onward less turbulently on its course to the sea—if, indeed, it does not yield up its life into some other cataract or more majestic river.

To-night its effect was mournful and desolate. In the growing dark, the surrounding solitude and gloom seemed portentous. The deep blackness of the pines was losing itself in the deeper blackness of night, but one felt that the melancholy trees were there, and their influence remained. The very rocks took weird shapes and forms; and extending my walk for some short distance beyond the waterfall, a huge road-side stone so caught the outline of a crouching bear that for one moment I stood rooted to the spot in unpleasant doubt.

But if at any period of the world's history it had been endowed with life, all that had long since been petrified, perhaps by one of the good spirits haunting this region. The stone is still there, reader, beside the steep slope, under the shadow of the trees, guarding the way. It may probably see out this century and the next in its present position, and you may satisfy yourself as to the resemblance as you pass that way.

But it must be when the very last shades of twilight are expiring—as they were expiring on this occasion—or the charm will be broken, the spell will not work, the weird influence upon the mind will be wanting. For similar effects you must have similar causes; and if a fair landscape is described to you, all balmy air, and golden suns and tropical flowers, and singing birds, and you visit that fair landscape in mid-winter, and find it all snow and east winds and leaden skies, do not therefore conclude that the former state of things never existed and will never return. The occasion, and not the writer, must be credited with the change.

For, poor frail mortals that we are, we cannot control our sunshine: cannot command a day or an hour, or be certain of a moment: cannot turn one hair white or black, or add one cubit to our stature. We have to take all things as we find them; be thankful for our small mercies as well as our great; hope for the best; hope on, hope ever; hold on our little way; and trust that at the end of the long line of life there is a goal where all will be well; the wrong become right, the crooked be made straight: a sunshine eternal, without fear of any cloud or stormy weather.

Groping up the zig-zag ladder as best the darkness allowed, I wended my way back to the settlement (I know no better name for it), whose lights, shining through the gloom, were the only beacon

wherewith to guide one's steps. There, in a room that had once been the refectory of the monks, or something of the kind (for this portion of the abbey had been adapted to modern purposes), supper was not only ready but nearly over. At least thirty people were seated at a long table, busy with their knives and forks—especially the knives. I had thought to be alone in this out-of-the-world spot, and behold a crowd. As usual where a number of Germans are assembled, conversation waxed animated and voices loud. The German women know little of that excellent thing in their sex, a sweet voice, and to a shrill treble the men chime in with a firm double bass. Singular that so musical a people should neglect a charm we prize so highly.

What spirits were abroad that night, hovering in the air, whispering in the rustling of the pines, the ceaseless murmur of the waterfall? Sleep brought no unconsciousness, no rest; it was haunted by dreams in which ghouls and goblins played a part, bears and wolves springing out from the depths of the forest, and it was a perpetual dance of death, as it were, to escape with life. All night long, even in sleep, the rush of the water never ceased; and when morning dawned upon another day I felt that I had verily and indeed been possessed by the unseen powers of the air. The spirits of the monks were at work. Perhaps those who had shirked their dull, dry routine of duties in life were performing penance. Never was there so uncanny a spot: never a place so thoroughly given up to witchcraft. And—strange, corroborative fact—later on, in comparing notes with fellow pilgrims, I found they had had identically the same experiences, were haunted by the same terrible dreams, went through the same terrific combats.

Yes, there was something mysterious and unearthly about Allerheiligen. Whether the inn had been built on consecrated ground, and the ghosts of the friars resented the desecration; whether it displeased them that a spot devoted to religious purposes for so many centuries should now be given up to the vulgar and secular uses of public entertainment; whether, in this out-of-the-world spot, sundry murders had been committed, and the victims, in unquiet resting places, were hovering about the world they had quitted too soon and tormenting mankind: this cannot be known. Certain it is, that I felt as if a month had passed away, battles and sieges and the crack of a hundred dooms, since the previous evening.

In the early morning I went for a long look at the ruins, so singular a sight in this remote quarter. There rose the crumbling walls that once had echoed with the mournful, monotonous Gregorian chants of the monks; there at the midnight mass in days gone by, the lighted windows must have gleamed weirdly amidst the impenetrable outside darkness; whilst within, those members of a most austere order performed their duties, some possibly nodding wearily, and doing penance next day for the weakness of the flesh. Here, in those grass-grown courts, age after age, century after century, the long, cold, gloomy

corridors must have echoed to the footsteps of the brethren, as they crept along in cowl and sandal, and, perhaps, like the monks of La Trappe, raised their eyes to each other's faces only to give additional force to the mournful "memento mori" of that order. All trace of the corridors had disappeared; the very ruin of much that had existed could no longer be seen; the monks and their order had passed into the land of shadows; but all surrounding nature, the running stream, the eternal, pine-clad hills remained the same. These change not.

I returned and found that everyone breakfasted in a sort of covered shed or open room attached to the main building. The morning was fresh and chilly; the ladies wore their bonnets, the gentlemen their hats. There was great bowing and scraping amongst them; endless ceremonies and inquiries as to how everyone had slept. All looked as if breakfast indoors in a sensible room with closed windows would have been much more agreeable. For the sun had not penetrated into the hollow; the gloom of the hills alone was enough to freeze one at this early hour; the rushing water, in fancy at any rate, chilled all the air. But the coffee, and the delicious honey that you find all over the Black Forest, and the hard-boiled eggs served out to everyone, a little modified this state of things, and put something of life and animation into the assembled groups.

Punctually at nine o'clock Jehu came round with the carriage. He, at any rate, looked neither goblin-haunted nor in any other way disturbed. The landlord closed the door, with a flourish; wished me a happy journey; made a deep obeisance as he begged the favour of recommendation. The coachman cracked his whip; the loiterers in the breakfast-room looked after the carriage, and—I hope—speeded the parting guest. We left the ruins, and the inn, and all the rest of it behind us, and went on our way rejoicing.

## OUR AMATEUR CONCERT.

"FRANCES, my dear," said Mr. Smallwood to his wife, "there's terrible distress in the village still, I hear."

"Ah!" sighed the lady addressed, "I'm afraid so, John, indeed. Though if *every* one had given as much as we did, the Thursday Children's Dinners need not have fallen through, nor yet the Men's Sunday Breakfasts."

"I wish we could afford to give the Rector another fifty," continued Mr. Smallwood, "but I suppose that's out of the question. We've given all we can just now, and they say 'charity begins at home.'"

The gentleman quitted the room here, and his wife fell into a musing fit.

That evening, when dinner was over and Mr. and Mrs. Smallwood, a middle-aged couple "without encumbrance," as the advertisements say, sat in their drawing-room, amidst the numerous guests invited down to Smallwood Hall for the first few weeks of the New Year, the hostess electrified her company by a proposition, which, from her unusually thoughtful demeanour since the conversation reported above, had evidently been germinating in the worthy lady's mind for some hours.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," she began, from her easy chair, raising her closed fan to command attention and drawing the gaze of all the occupants of the room on her at once: "I have an appeal to make. The poor people of our village are suffering acutely in various ways, from the privations attendant on this continued hard weather. My husband and I have given all we can afford for their relief, and now I want to call upon *you* for *your* contributions."

She paused. Her guests *all* looked astonished. *Some* looked angry. Some simply avoided her eye. Some put their hands in their pockets at once.

With a smile she continued, "*Not* in money!"

Again a change came over the company. The hands moved away from the pockets. The eyes that had bent themselves to the ground were raised again in innocence and frankness. The mouths that had begun to droop, smiled.

"The contribution that I ask from you is Talent! Of the company now in this room, and staying in this house, almost every one possesses musical talent."

How funny some of the faces began to look now!

"The charming little musical evenings we enjoy in this drawing-room assure me that we have only to hire the Infants' School-room of

Dr. Blount; draw out our programme; fix the price of admission, and give a concert which will fill the coffers of the Relief Committee at once!"

The faces of the guests were no longer turned on their hostess. With one accord they turned to each other. Miss Fanny Markham, who sang the soprano of the duet "False Vows," instantly looked at her sister Annie, who sang the alto. Mr. Downs, the basso-profundo, looked at Mr. Wilson, the light tenor. Two gentlemen, who played the violin, exchanged glances of defiance; and little Sutton, who considered that Rubinstein wasn't in it with him on the pianoforte, gazed with serene contempt through his double eye-glass on Fred Hardwicke, who dared to aspire to play the same instrument. Timid little Ella Dean, of whose piano playing even the great little Sutton had condescended to allow that it was "not bad—for a young lady," blushed up to the eyes and looked frightened to death at Mrs. Smallwood's proposition. And others of the company received the idea in their own peculiar way, and finally it was adopted. Dr. Blount lent the school-room with joy, and promoted the sale of tickets and distribution of programmes far and wide.

And now that our amateurs found themselves actually let in for public performance, and saw their names, which had hitherto slumbered in the safe obscurity of home, billed about the little town of Crickley, in letters an inch high, they wore faces of gloomy importance indeed; and the walls of Smallwood Hall echoed through the long hours of the day with practice dire and dread.

From the recesses of my own room, whither I was fain to retire sometimes, my ear was constantly greeted with far-off thundering exercises and fantasias—with hoarse shoutings in the bass clef, and distant wailings, moanings, and shriekings in the tenor, alto, and soprano dittos. Just as I would be congratulating myself on being sufficiently far removed from the noise to bear it pretty equably, to my horror a sudden sharp wail in the room adjoining would inform me that one of the violinists had come up to practise.

I am ashamed to describe myself as a young man who plays no instrument, neither possesses a voice, except for the ordinary work-a-day purposes of speaking, laughing, or, when occasion demands it, shouting. I feel myself, in consequence, a strange and almost anomalous being in this age, when everyone, down to the very lackeys, is proficient on some instrument, and many on two or three.

Of course, then, I was a mere myth among all these hard-working musicians. If I happened to be in the drawing-room when any piece or song was tried to test the improvement made in it by that day's practice, and ventured to say I thought "it went splendidly," my approbation would be heard with perfect apathy; while, were another performer by, his or her opinion would be anxiously solicited, and, even if "damning with faint praise," would be received with grateful delight.

Trouble soon arose, I regret to say, to mar the pleasure of good Mrs. Smallwood in her project. The programme was being drawn out one afternoon by a committee of the artistes, led, of course, by little Sutton, eye-glasses and all—and witnessed with much interest by our host and hostess and all the rest of the house party. "Now," cried Mrs. Smallwood, who, though no performer, superintended the general arrangements with great zest, and had, moreover, sufficient musical taste and knowledge to make valuable suggestions; "Now, Edward, read us the programme *so* far!"

Little Sutton, the "Edward" addressed, complied and started off. "First Part opens with glee, 'The Matadores!' the Misses Markham, Mr. Wilson, and Mr. Downs." Fanny and Annie blushed and smiled at each other. "Pianoforte Solo," went on the reader, "(a) Chromatic Fugue, Bach; (b) Demon Dance, Liszt, Mr. E. Sutton."

He coloured slightly, raised his eyebrows, settled his glasses anew, darted a complex sort of look at the unconscious Fred Hardwicke, and continued.

"Song, 'The Ruffian,' Mr. Downs; Ballad, 'The Fairy's Home,' Miss Fanny Markham; Pianoforte Solo, Variations on the well-known air 'Robin Adair,' Thalberg, Miss Ella Dean."

"I shall never be able to do it!" cried poor Ella, and then grew scarlet at her hardihood in making the statement. Sutton looked in pitying kindness.

"Oh yes, you will, Miss Ella," he said, consolingly. "You mustn't be frightened." Then he resumed his reading.

"Duet, 'False Vows,' the Misses Fanny and Annie Markham; Song, 'Oh! Star of Night,' Mr. Wilson; Pianoforte Solo"—the little stuck-up beggar paused, and I fancied I detected a sneer as he announced "Adagio and Rondo, from Sonata in A flat, Beethoven, Mr. Fred Hardwicke." Fred, however, noticed nothing. "Duet (Vocal), 'Your Money or Your Life!' Mr. Downs and Mr. Wilson."

Mrs. Smallwood here interrupted. "I think, Edward" (Sutton was a sort of distant relative), "it would be a great addition to the programme if you and Mr. Hardwicke could give us a pianoforte duet."

Little Sutton said nothing, but Fred, who is rather a good-natured fellow, cried out, "All right, Mrs. Smallwood, I've no objection. We might get up 'The Thunderstorm Galop!'" turning to Sutton. "We'll settle who's to have treble and who bass by-and-by," continued Fred. Sutton coloured angrily, as if he thought there should be no question of that.

And now a diversion occurred. Old Mr. Biddlecombe (Mrs. Smallwood's uncle—a rich stock broker) had been listening with an expression of absorbed interest up to now; and when he heard this proposition to introduce a new item, in the shape of a pianoforte duet, into the programme, he seemed to pluck up courage to say

what had been in his head, for he suddenly called out, "And you may put down some *more* fresh things, Edward! A couple of songs from me—one in each part!"

"*You*, uncle!" exclaimed Mrs. Smallwood. "*You!*"

"Yes! me!" retorted the old gentleman, getting red in the face. "Why should you show so much surprise?"

"Because—because," faltered Mrs. Smallwood, "I should have thought you would not care about appearing on a platform." She would have added "because you can't sing," had she dared.

Mr. Biddlecombe stopped her. "No, no, my dear, I shan't mind it for once, especially as it's for charity. In fact, I shall rather enjoy it. I'll show them how songs were sung fifty years ago, when I was a lad. Put me down for 'Swabbing the Deck, Mates,' and 'Here's to Davy Jones.' I'll send for the songs by this afternoon's post." And to prevent further opposition, he waddled out of the room.

Edward Sutton looked perplexed, and glanced at Mrs. Smallwood for counsel. That lady was gazing thoughtfully down at her own hands. Then she looked up and shed a resigned smile round on us all. "It is unfortunate that my uncle should have taken this determination," she said, "but as he has, we must make the best of it. His singing, I am afraid, is not up to concert mark."

Edward Sutton threw back his head and laughed out. Some of the others looked as if they would have liked to do the same, but not having the privilege of relationship went no further. The conclave broke up soon after; for the programme was not prepared beyond the end of the first part.

That evening Edward Sutton and Fred Hardwicke began to practise "The Thunderstorm—Galop di Bravura." Sutton took the treble as a matter of course.

"Oh! I'm to have the bass, am I?" cried Fred, with a laugh.

"You can have this part—*if you want it!*" said his colleague, looking confused, and speaking frigidly.

"Oh! I don't say I want it," was Fred's careless rejoinder. "I think the best player ought to have it—whichever of us that is."

"Well—I—I opine that *I* am the better player of the two," little Sutton managed to get out, his very forehead crimsoning with the effort of saying it, and the determination not to be "sat upon."

"So I should imagine you opined," replied Fred, "and perhaps *I* opine the same thing regarding myself. But neither you nor I should take it on ourselves to judge who's fitted best for the parts. We'll put it to a committee of the house."

All the company in the drawing-room accordingly were called upon to decide this knotty point, and no doubt the debating and discussing would have gone on till now had not some one, with a more fertile imagination than the rest, suggested, "Let them draw lots!" The lots were prepared, adjusted, and shaken full five minutes in one of

Mrs. Smallwood's Dresden vases; then they drew, and to my great gratification Fred drew treble, and Sutton bass. The latter flounced on to the other music-chair with a very sour visage. "You'll have to alter the variation on page two," he snarled. "You haven't the octave play to do it as it's written."

Fred laughed, and they began to read the piece together. Presently a pause in the music. They had begun to quarrel over the pedals. "*I* shall take both pedals," Sutton was saying, "and use them at my own discretion."

"*That* you certainly won't!" retorted Fred Hardwicke. "D'you think I'm going to let anyone pedal for me? It would take all the spirit out of my playing!"

"*I* shall have the pedals!" repeated little Sutton, doggedly, looking straight before him. "You *must* know that the pedals ought to be managed by the ——"

"Better player," interrupted Fred, "so I shall have them."

Sutton laughed scornfully, and a grinding of feet followed, each trying to turn the other off the coveted pedal.

"Pray Edward! Pray Mr. Hardwicke!" cried poor Mrs. Smallwood, at her wits' end for fear the quarrelsome musicians should fall out so far as to give up the duet altogether. "Pray settle this little matter amicably. Let the one who has 'pedal' marked use it for himself, and the other the same." Ashamed to continue their wrangling further, the matter was left in the way suggested by our hostess.

Old Mr. Biddlecombe's songs arrived in due course, and he began to practise them; adding another, and, I am bound to say, a most terrible and indefatigable one, to the howling fraternity, who "made night (and day) hideous" at Smallwood Hall. I was beginning to think I would try to get my visit over, the practising was so distracting, and all companionship for walks, drives, and rides was gone.

The desire to hear how our amateur friends comported themselves in public overcame this petulant resolution, however, and I stayed on at the Hall. Ella Dean grew dreadfully nervous as the 20th approached, and when Dr. Blount assured Mrs. Smallwood that the room would be positively packed, he knew for certain, I saw poor little Ella turn as pale as death. I trembled for her success. She is but seventeen, and shy and childish for that even. The child practised more incessantly than any of them, getting up, I heard, at day-break for the purpose. She was ambitious to do well.

At last—at last—the 20th arrived! At breakfast that morning most of the performers looked anxious and pale. Mrs. Smallwood looked smilingly round at the assembled "troupe" as she poured out coffee, but I think her smile covered secret misgivings.

Old Biddlecombe yelled his two dreadful songs the whole morning, and then went up to his room to rest, and drink some compound he had made for his voice. Most of the performers took a holiday from practice. Fred Hardwicke was an exception, and little Ella Dean

dashed through her solo in a frenzied fashion that augured ill for her later and more risky performance.

After luncheon we went for a stroll en masse, looking quite a large party. The Misses Markham were my companions, and as they are extremely pleasant and lady-like girls, I enjoyed my walk very much. So, I think, did they. Anyhow, we laughed a good deal. Home again at five. Tea with the ladies in the dusk drawing-room. An interval of welcome laziness and lounging. Then dinner, for which undress was allowed, as the performers preferred getting into their "war-paint" afterwards.

The concert was fixed for eight o'clock, and at a quarter past seven the drawing-room at Smallwood Hall presented a brilliant scene of gorgeous toilettes. Trains rustled, shirt-studs twinkled, gloves were drawn on, and their many buttons manipulated by nervous fingers; music was rolled hastily into cases. Each fresh arrival from up-stairs increased the powerful odour of y-lang y-lang, and new mown hay, which struggled with the scent of hot-house flowers. At last we all set out in various vehicles, and, after a quarter of an hour's drive, reached the school-room adjoining Crickley parish church. A side-door took the whole of the Smallwood Hall party into the small room which had been improvised into an ante-room for the occasion, and from the door of which we could see the audience pouring rapidly into the concert hall. The latter place was already half-full, for Mrs. Smallwood was very well-known and much liked in the neighbourhood, and had not scrupled to make full use of her popularity in inducing her neighbours to come to the concert she had promoted with such charitable views.

The sight of all the faces in rows half down the room completely scared some of our performers, and even Fred Hardwicke was heard to mutter, as he peeped from the ante-room door, "Hope I shan't make a fool of myself before all these people!" As for Ella Dean, she was so white and trembling that I observed to Mrs. Smallwood, "It would be almost better to substitute something else for her solo."

Mrs. Smallwood accordingly said to her, in a low tone, "Ella, dear, we'll have an apology made, and you shall be excused."

This, however, Ella was ashamed to have done. "Mr. Sutton says I shall not feel so bad when I'm once at the instrument," she said; "and it would be so silly to be the only one to show the white feather!"

There was the secret of Ella's determination to go on with it. No one else had seceded. The little creature had plenty of pride evidently. Would she had had more nerve!

Mrs. Smallwood of course wished to hear her concert "from the front;" so, after staying in the artistes' room till it wanted but a minute or two to eight, she took her husband's arm and adjourned to the concert hall, followed by those of her guests who were to play nothing but the part of listeners.

We left a somewhat dispiriting scene behind us. The Misses Markham were clearing their throats every minute, and looking feverishly over the glee that opened the programme, whispering now and then to each other, as they pointed out different parts of it, "I hope I shan't go flat *there;*" "I'm certain I shall crack on that F sharp," or "When I break down *here* you must just go on without me, dear." Ella Dean was looking fixedly into space, her brows slightly contracted, her breathing hurried, a copy of her piece on her lap, and her cold, ungloved hands reposing on it. The violinists were tuning up their instruments and maintaining a rather disconnected conversation, interspersed with somewhat gasping laughs. Mr. Downs and Mr. Wilson stood with folded arms and closed lips, apparently solving some knotty mathematical problems in their heads. Fred Hardwicke could not forbear some jokes at the expense of his fellow-performers, but he owned to being in a "confounded funk" himself. Little Sutton, who had superintended the preparation and decoration of the concert room and the getting in of the piano, a huge "grand" from Binchester, was full of importance. His colour was higher than usual, his manner was very civil, his little feet kept tripping to the door of the ante-room and back to report how the hall was filling; and altogether I was gratified to note that he, too, was nervous.

Old Biddlecombe was the only one of the party who seemed at his ease. There he stood, dressed out to perform, a diamond twinkling in his shirt-front, his white gloves clasped behind him, his face redder than ever, and his figure looking a vast deal too pronounced for the platform. Mrs. Smallwood gave him a thoughtful glance as she prepared to go away, and I heard her say to her husband, as they walked before me, "I wish I could have persuaded uncle not to sing!"

Settled in the front row of the reserved seats, I took a survey of the room. Decorations on a grand scale. About two dozen evergreens, in pots, grouped lavishly round the foot of the platform. Names of six composers illuminated in blue and crimson letters on white paper tablets, and stuck at intervals on the wall above the platform—Beethoven, with three dead bay-leaves curling over the top of him; Thalberg and Liszt, each adorned with a couple of holly-berries; Gounod, Blumenthal, and Dibdin left plain.

Having somewhat recovered from the effect of this overwhelming display, I found leisure to recognise round me several faces I had seen at church and met at neighbouring houses during my stay at Smallwood Hall. Mr. and Mrs. Smallwood were greeted with countless "How d'ye do's," taps on the shoulder, and inquiries from the numerous friends seated near them. I looked at my watch. Five minutes past eight. A storm of applause from the expectant audience was a gentle hint that it was time to begin. I glanced at the ante-room door, and saw Sutton's face withdrawn rapidly from the aperture. I could not forbear a smile and a selfish thanksgiving that *I* was not

one of the doomed creatures who figured on the programme. In another moment up came Mr. Downs leading Miss Fanny Markham, and up came Mr. Wilson leading Miss Annie. Little Sutton tripped lightly after them, and glided to the instrument to accompany. Enthusiastic marks of approval burst from the audience.

It was easy enough to come up, but not so easy, it seemed, to arrange themselves. Our glee-singers were evidently on a platform for the first time in their lives. On coming up the two gentlemen stood in the middle, with a lady on each outside. This seemed to strike them as wrong. The gentlemen stepped back to allow the ladies to pass into the centre position. The ladies, not understanding their intention, stepped back also. They collided. An audible titter ran through the audience, though they kept on clapping. Mrs. Smallwood looked hard at her programme, and bit her lip. An agreeable but somewhat puzzling little episode ensued among our friends on the platform. With crimson faces, and a pained expression on the same, they seemed bent on performing a scrap out of a quadrille. The scared faces of the two violinists were plainly visible peering from the artistes' room. At last, with a desperate plunge, the unlucky four advanced to the front, the two girls in the middle and the gentlemen outside. The clapping continued. "Bow! bow!" Sutton had been muttering ever since taking his place at the instrument. Fanny Markham heard it at length, and straightway performed a spasmodic, apologetic obeisance. Her colleagues caught it as if it had been a yawn, and followed her example, hurriedly and not too gracefully. Then began a mighty rustling and turning over of music, and a furtive comparing of divers passages, together with an exchange of frightened, beseeching glances between the glee-singers. Mr. Downs dropped his copy and picked it up again. The clapping ceased. A feeble prelude trickled over the keys of the concert grand, and the glee commenced.

I do not know if my reader is acquainted with the glee entitled "The Matadores." It is not a bad one in its way, and possesses the desideratum (with *some* persons) that a vast amount of noise *can* be got out of it. The bass voice has, among other trifling duties, to imitate the bellowing of a bull—matadores, I believe, have some mysterious connection with those animals. Mr. Downs had been wont to do this part rather well. But, alas! to-night he began the bellowing of the musical beast much too soon; found out his error; ceased; forgot when it ought to come in; completely lost his head; and did nothing but give a series of feeble, experimental bellows, at intervals of five or six bars, throughout the whole of the first part of the composition. Fanny Markham was a semi-tone flat, and her sister about the same interval sharp. Wilson cracked on all his high notes—so the effect was altogether pleasing.

When they reached the end of the first part Fanny and Annie looked unutterable things at each other, and the two men stared hard

at their music. The second part went better; the bellowing came in all right, and, being sung with double force, proved a set-off against the previous failure.

A hearty burst of applause greeted the four as they filed cheerfully off, followed by little Sutton. Mrs. Smallwood breathed more freely. "Now," she murmured, "things will go better; the ice is broken."

True, Mrs. Smallwood! the ice is broken! Let us hope none of our performers will fall into the hole!

Sutton was the next on the list. His "Demon Dance" was a discordant thing enough, even at Smallwood Hall, but *now!* I don't believe even *demons* could have danced to it, such a wild scramble did it prove. It contained, moreover, many and many a discord, of which I am certain the learned Abbé who wrote it was quite innocent. There was a pause, too, in one place, that I never remember noticing before. He managed to get through it, however, and went off hastily; and, I saw not on very good terms with himself.

Then came "The Fairy's Home." Miss Fanny Markham was not to be congratulated on her rendering of this ballad. She opened her lips with the best of intentions, but only a faint, whispering gasp represented the "Fairy's" trills, turns, and bravura passages. The audience, who had not attained the pitch of musical refinement referred to above, were evidently relieved when the Fairy finished her somewhat lengthy description of her residence "in the woodland green and the dells and vales," and was conducted out of their sight.

"Now," thought I, "poor Ella must come under fire!" I was really anxious and sympathetic about this poor child, for not only had she a pretty, modest face and manner, but I admired the pluck which made her persevere in her determination to play. They led her up. She was as colourless as her white frock, and had far too many other matters to think about, to dream of bowing to the room. "Poor child!" whispered a lady in the row behind; "it is cruel to make her play. She looks fit to faint!"

Ella was taken to the piano. Before she had well sat down she had dashed into her piece. Oh! so fast! Oh! so frenzied! The loud pedal pressed down by her nervous little foot the whole time. Scramble! Scramble! Dash! Dash! My teeth are set, and I feel my face flush, as I watch her pained, frowning countenance, across which a sharp spasm shoots when some more than usually shocking chord is struck. She has got to the foot of the first page, and things grow worse instead of better. Her face is deathly white. A variation begins. Off goes the right hand with a run. The left tries to follow—the run has broken down! Hurriedly she attempts it again; faster this time. It has broken down again—in an earlier stage! She looks wildly at the audience, more wildly at the gentleman who is "turning" for her, dashes both her hands down on an excruciating

chord, and then, rising from her seat, she puts her fingers in her ears, and darts from the platform!

I never could make out why she put her fingers in her ears, unless to shut out imaginary hisses. Certain it is she had no real ones to fear. The audience tried to coax her back by hearty and prolonged applause. But on Mrs. Smallwood hurrying into the ante-room, poor Ella was found dissolved in tears, so there was an end of *her* performances for the evening. Old Biddlecombe was the next performer, and he certainly did not lack nerve, if he *did* lack musical ability. There the old gentleman stood, bowing away and smiling in response to the clapping of hands that greeted such a remarkable figure. It was a comic song he sang; but, through the first verse, either from the broker's indistinct articulation, or natural obtuseness on the part of his audience, it was listened to as solemnly as if it had been a recitative from one of the oratorios. At the end of the first verse, therefore, he signed to Hardwicke, who was accompanying him, to stop for a moment, and broke out with, "Ladies and gentlemen, I beg to inform you that this is a *comic* song! You did not seem aware of the fact, or perhaps you were afraid I might not like too much laughter. Don't be frightened of that! If you laugh all through it, I shan't be offended!"

Mrs. Smallwood turned scarlet, and read her programme with deep interest; the good lady was terribly ashamed of her irrepressible relative, and the audience, complying with his request full early, broke at once into loud laughter, which lasted through the rest of the song, and was doubtless more at the singer than what he sang. For, what with his speech, his appearance, and the antiquated, over-done "comedy business" he introduced as the song progressed, it was a difficult matter to keep one's cachinnations within reasonable bounds, and the old fellow ended in a roar that might have been heard a mile off. He went away beaming and triumphant to receive the congratulations of the poor souls in the ante-room.

Then came forward Mr. Wells and his violin. It was unfortunate for this gentleman that he came before an audience worked into a laughing humour, and that he had a trick of making what the children call "faces" as he played. At each fresh bar Mr. Wells performed some new and weird grimace, and as regularly did a low murmur of merriment undulate through the room. At last, becoming aware of this, when not quite half-way through his solo, poor Mr. Wells stopped in a flurry, glanced nervously downwards to see if in his pre-occupation he had put on any unusual article of dress, looked at the audience, colouring painfully, tried to resume his playing, failed, tried again, grew very white, bowed low, and scuttled off the platform, whither no amount of cheering and encouragement could entice him back.

Fred Hardwicke's sonata followed, and went in first-rate style. Fred vanished after it, amid the bravos from all parts, and I smiled to think of what must be Sutton's feelings.

The next item was "The Thunderstorm — Galop di Bravura." "Here comes a treat," said I, for I admired the duet greatly.

The two young men ascended the platform. Fred having established himself a favourite, was greeted with quite a "reception." Sutton looked awfully jealous—indeed, downright savage. They took their seats, and I saw that odious little Sutton squaring his elbows and taking up quite three-quarters of the key-board. There was an audible scuffling of feet too in the vicinity of the pedals, so *that* battle was evidently being fought over afresh. Presently they started, after fierce whispers and glaring on the part of the bass performer. Fred had a perceptible smile playing about his face. "The Thunderstorm" raged on furiously for several pages, and Fred was doing wonders in the treble in imitation of the lightning and hail, when the scuffling of feet began again worse than ever—and presently Sutton suddenly ceased playing, and, scarlet in the face, turned upon Fred. "I tell you I *will* have the pedals when I want them!" he screamed; "you *shan't* bully me like this!"

Fred, taken by surprise, left off playing too, and a loud laugh broke from the audience. I have not the least doubt that the little creature did this out of jealousy, to spoil the effect of the duet, in which Hardwicke was playing brilliantly. And he certainly succeeded; for the break marred the whole thing, and when they *did* take it up again Fred's playing was not so good as it had been.

This ended the first part of the concert. The second part, I rejoice to say, was decidedly better; for the performers, though still doing some queer things, were more at their ease. At eleven o'clock it was over, and the audience was set free. I heard one lady say to her friend as she went out, "It's been as good as the theatre. I've seen few comedies that have made me laugh so much!" And this, I believe, was the general opinion in the neighbourhood regarding Mrs. Smallwood's concert. In one respect it succeeded. A good deal of money was made and handed over to Dr. Blount for the poor, resulting in blankets, coal and soup.

Edward Sutton went back to town next day, with a carpet-bag in his hand, and a hideous scowl on his face. Hardwicke tells me that he has since been cut dead in London by the jealous little mortal. Ella Dean was ill with nervous headache for nearly a week after the terrible night. The Misses Markham managed to survive, with health and tempers unimpaired; but whenever I mention our amateur concert to them they are sure to look at each other with large, horrified eyes, and say, in a tone of deep feeling, "Oh! wasn't it *awful!*"

Mrs. Smallwood has decided never to get up another amateur concert. "After all," she says, musingly, "professionals do that kind of thing best!"

## THE LAST ELM OF THE AVENUE.

A PITCH-DARK night, rain falling in torrents, wind blowing gustily from every point of the compass at once. Two or three oil lamps flickered feebly in the gloom on a struggling crowd of damp passengers, a chaotic mass of luggage, and—no porters.

Such were my earliest impressions on being turned out of the London down train at Westwood, the station for Cinqhaven, whither I and some half-dozen other officers were bound, to complete our education by a course of musketry instruction.

"*Where's* Cinqhaven?" was my first very natural inquiry. "And how am I to get there?"

Cinqhaven was "across there," a civil official replied, pointing over an expanse of ploughed field in the direction of the South Pole. The one omnibus had, it appeared, departed with a small selection from the impatient crowd of belated travellers, but would be back again directly.

"How soon?" I asked.

"Well, in about an hour or so."

I thanked him, committed my belongings to his care, and with a benediction on my luck and the colonel who had sent me there, plunged out into the night.

Outside the station I found an officer with his party, a sergeant and some privates, about to march to Cinqhaven: and gladly joined them.

I took for granted some one knew the way. *I* didn't. Such a night! Rain pelting us viciously, wind blowing our fragmentary attempts at conversation away into space. Finally, at a point where five roads met, and the wind and rain did their wickedest, we halted. Fire and candle-light streamed invitingly out of the unshuttered window of a low, white house; a sign creaked over our heads in the darkness, and, after brief debate, in we all turned to the cozy kitchen of the Green Lion.

We were not unwilling to accept the landlady's assurances that the storm would "blow itself out" in half an hour or less. She invited us into her own snug parlour, and here, for the first time, I got a good look at my companion.

He was a tall, handsome fellow, with dark complexion, and curiously light eager eyes; by name, I discovered, Captain Angus MacLeish, of the 34th (Royal Cromarty) Highlanders. (Here I may introduce myself to my readers: Lieutenant Jones, Royal North Wales Militia.) Captain MacLeish was rather stiff and high and mighty at first, I thought—very much the Highland chieftain. "Caolchairn," or some such pretty name, was, I found, his correct designation. Still, I let

him see that I considered a Jones of Prybwllych the equal of any man in Her Majesty's service, and we gradually warmed into sociability over the landlady's blazing fire, and such refreshment as the Green Lion afforded.

The landlady's prediction was verified in less than the time mentioned. The storm blew over, the clouds parted, and a clear white moon shone out.

Half an hour's quick walking brought us to the top of the hill, under which lay the little town of Cinqhaven. Its red roofs looked pretty and picturesque in the moonlight beyond, and to westward the sea and the marshes stretching away grey and mysterious; below us a row of lighted windows showed where the barracks stood.

"That's a welcome sight," said MacLeish.

"Were you ever here before?" I asked.

"Never. I only heard of the place last week—ah!"—he stopped short.

I looked round in amazement. He was standing upright and rigid, his eyes fixed on some point in the road before us, his forefinger extended.

"Why, what's the matter?" I asked, looking down the road—white and lonely—and seeing only a milestone standing out distinctly from the dark hedge.

"*There!*" His eyes dilated with a fixed stare of horror, his breath came short and quick, and at last, with a sharp cry, he swayed forward and fell insensible on the path. I thought he tried to say something, but failed to understand him. The soldiers had halted, and two came rushing up vociferating wildly in some unknown tongue. They knelt beside him and raised him, all stark and white, in the moonshine. I gave a few directions, to which they vouchsafed not the smallest attention; but somehow they contrived to support him between them, and we proceeded to the barracks; no great distance, fortunately.

I questioned the sergeant, who had looked on meanwhile with undisturbed composure. He declined to commit himself to any opinion whatever. The privates were "Caolchairn's" own people, puir ignorant Hieland bodies, who could hardly speak English. Could *he* understand Gaelic? Weel, a word, or may be twa. What had Captain MacLeish said as he fell? It sounded like "into my grave," but he culdna be positeeve. And here Sergeant Tulloch's communications came to an abrupt stop, and I could only extract, in addition, that the Highlanders knew best what to do with their chief, and that "he'd be a' right the morn."

So he was. He appeared on parade right enough. I found that he and I were in the same section; also that, of all the sixty officers composing the "course," he was the only one with whom I had the slightest acquaintance. He was in the same position, I fancy—so we fraternized to a certain extent—walked over to Boatstown together—

the popular amusement of the period, and worked at the red book in company. He was an odd young fellow, as starchily repellent as a Spanish Don one moment, and the next boyishly expansive and communicative. I think he was really desperately shy—the result of home-breeding. He gave me a description of his Highland home one day, with its mountain and moor, loch and forest, where the MacLeishs lived in feudal state, naught appertaining to true dignity of a real Highland chieftain being lacking, from the pipers to the deadly feud. The MacLeishs of Caolchairn, and the MacLeishs of Tuchoran had killed, burned, betrayed, massacred and generally made themselves mutually unpleasant from time immemorial. The two branches of this amiable family sprang from twin brothers, and, according to tradition, were to carry on the same bloodthirsty relations till they became simultaneously extinct.

"And may I ask how you and the representative of the other line conduct yourselves when you happen to meet in society now-a-days?" I inquired. MacLeish laughed.

"We *don't* meet. Tuchoran was sold generations ago and the MacLeish of that date died abroad. We have often tried to trace out his descendants, but with only partial success. Perhaps it's as well," he continued with an embarrassed laugh, "for they say that though we don't slay and plunder now-a-days, the—the curse is on us yet. When one of each line shall meet, there follows calamity."

I looked as profoundly impressed as he could desire.

"Ten years ago a clergyman in the South—chaplain to a hospital—wrote to my father to say his cousin, Fergus MacLeish, lay dying—mortally injured in some discreditable brawl. My father, good man, started at once. He was in time to see the dying man and to promise to befriend his only son—a boy of about fourteen. Fergus MacLeish died with his hand clasped in my father's. It was their first and last meeting."

"Well! No harm came of it, I suppose."

"My father never saw his home again. He was killed in the great railway accident on the Great Northern."

"What became of the boy?" I asked presently.

"Young Fergus? He was an utter good-for-nothing. My mother gave the chaplain carte blanche, and he did his utmost to reclaim him. It was no use. He was in and out of prison half-a-dozen times, and at last we shipped him off to the Colonies—but I'm almost sure I met him last year at the Derby."

"How did you know him?"

"By his likeness to myself. It's curiously strong. Also by another mark—a cut on one eyelid—that gives him a most sinister look. The chaplain mentioned it to me."

"Did anything happen?" I could not resist asking. MacLeish's face grew dark.

"Don't ask me—enough to ruin my life, and make it little worth having from henceforward. Hullo! It's seven o'clock. Do you dine at mess to-night?" and he left me to dress.

Still I got no nearer to any explanation of the occurrence on the first night of our meeting. He always avoided the Westwood road I noticed, and another peculiar fact which struck me was the way in which his servant Alistor—his foster-brother he told me—kept us constantly in sight. It was as if he expected me to do his master a mischief. Wherever we went Alistor's red head and foxy eyes appeared at unexpected moments. One day MacLeish came into my room in great distress. An accident had happened in the town—a scaffold had fallen, and Alistor, who was passing at the moment, had been knocked down and injured—some iron-work had struck his head, and it was feared had destroyed the sight of one eye.

"He must go up to town as soon as he can travel. Everything that the best man there can do for him shall be done. I'll trust him to no one here. My poor Alistor!"

I was able to assist in making arrangements for his stay in town, and both master and man were inordinately grateful.

I went with MacLeish to see him off at Westwood. There had been an agonizing scene when he heard that the oculist would require him to be at least a month under treatment. He refused to go—wept, expostulated, implored MacLeish on his knees not to send him away—at least, so I guessed, for the conversation was carried on in Gaelic. MacLeish promised to go up and see him every week—argued, coaxed, jested, and at last ordered him sternly to be silent and obey, and the poor fellow submitted. Tears were in his one visible eye when we said good-bye at the station, and he poured out what seemed to be a flood of impassioned warning. MacLeish answered good-humouredly, saying in English, "You will find me safe enough, you foolish fellow. Don't you think Mr. Jones here can take as good care of me as you?" Alistor turned suddenly upon me, scanning my face with his sharp eye.

"Are you in truth his faithful friend?"

I was too amazed to reply.

"Let all who wish well to Caolchairn stand by him now, *for his dark hour is at hand.*"

MacLeish hurried him into the train and I saw no more of him.

We walked back together down the memorable Westwood road.

"Can you guess what he means?" asked MacLeish, after long silence.

"Not in the least," I replied.

"Do you remember the night we came?"

"Perfectly," I answered. We turned a corner as I spoke, and the broad white road to Cinqhaven sloped down the hill at our feet—with the milestone standing out white and distinct against the dark hedge. MacLeish stopped.

"There, by that stone, on that night, stood Fergus MacLeish. I saw him as clearly as I see you now. He held out his hand, and said, 'Welcome! we are waiting for you, Caolchairn.' His face was clear in the moonlight. It was the face of a *dead man.*"

"I don't believe a word of it," I said energetically, to assure myself I was not frightened.

"Do as you please," said MacLeish coldly.

"It was evident," I reasoned, taking counsel with myself, "that poor MacLeish's brain had become diseased; living all his life in a bogie-ridden Highland stronghold, in an atmosphere of Gaelic superstition. He would be better without Alistor hovering about him and ministering to his fancies, and I must do my best drag him into society. He certainly hates the sight of his fellow-creatures as much as any man I know." Accordingly, next day, instead of our usual secluded seat on the shingle, by a deserted Martello tower, I suggested that we should take our books to the Parade, studying in public being a Cinqhaven fashion.

"Where's the Parade? I've never seen it yet," he remarked. I marched him eastwards forthwith. It was half-past twelve on a bright autumn morning, the sun was shining, the sea dancing, bevies of pretty children frolicking on the shingle, and three of the prettiest girls in Cinqhaven taking a brisk turn after bathing. The *very* prettiest bowed to me, and looked as if we *might* come and talk to her if we liked; but all that MacLeish said was: "It was a bad place for working, and that he wanted to go to the town and buy some red ink!"

"This way," I said. "You don't mean to say you've not been down the Lady's Avenue?"

We turned through a gate into the cool shade of some pollard elms that made a bowery walk across some low-lying meadows to the town. "Some dead-and-gone county lady—bless her considerate soul—planted this grove and bequeathed it to the town. It's the prettiest thing in Cinqhaven."

"The town doesn't seem to appreciate it," said MacLeish. "It has been let go to the bad. These trees want thinning and some young ones planting in those gaps ——"

"The Mayor and Corporation *are* awaking to a sense of their duties, I see," I said presently. "They are actually breaking up the ground and getting fresh earth in. I suppose it's twenty years since it was last done—and it will be twenty more before it's done again."

MacLeish did not answer; he seized my arm suddenly and pointed with outstretched finger to the last elm of the avenue.

"There!" he gasped; "he is there *again!*"

I saw nothing but two wheelbarrows, a plank, and two spades sticking upright in the newly-broken earth.

"Hold up!" I said. "Don't faint *here*, for Heaven's sake!" and

I shook him roughly. He looked at me vacantly, and I hurried him on. Presently he passed his hand across his eyes and drew a deep breath.

"My grave—or *his?*" he muttered.

He said no more till we reached the barracks, when he turned to me quite calmly and collectedly. "Laugh as you will—it can do no harm. I have seen *him* again. The third time will be the last." And he closed his door gently upon me.

I hadn't a chance of making many friends amongst the Cinqhaven residents, sociable and agreeable as they were, and was pleasantly surprised to meet some Welsh friends, established in one of the Parade houses for the season. They were a gay, hospitable set, with half a dozen pretty daughters, and as many sons, all holiday-making as hard as they could Something was always going on at the Pryse-Davieses, and I and many of my friends were made cordially welcome at any time. I conveyed numerous invitations to MacLeish—all politely but firmly declined. A pic-nic to Eastcliff Bay—a boating-party up the river to Lynas Castle—an afternoon dance: finally a seat on the drag to Northwold races.

On our return from our walk up the Avenue, I found yet another of Miss Winnie Pryse-Davies's pretty little notes lying on my table, and a second addressed to Captain A. MacLeish.

"A dance, after the races! Bless the girls, what constitutions they have! Is it worth while bothering MacLeish to go, I wonder? What *can* make them so crazy to cultivate his acquaintance?"

I gave no encouragement to Miss Winnie's hopes of his acceptance when I met her on the Parade that evening.

"Such a *shame!*" she said. "We want you all to come in uniform. It will make the room look so much better. *Yours* is lovely, I know —but a *Highland* dress!"

"Well, there are some 93rd men here. Shall I bring *them?*"

"Oh, as many as you can, by all means, but I had set my heart on your Highland chief." Here three more Miss Pryse-Davieses hurried up excitedly and delightedly. "He's *coming*, Winnie! Here's his note!"

I could hardly believe my eyes.

"Why not?" said MacLeish to me that night. "I've been very ungracious to your kind friends. Let me off the races, and I'll be as civil as you please all the evening. Next Friday, is it? Well, I hope they won't make a late affair of it. I'm going to shoot in the match on Saturday."

So it befel that on Friday evening a resplendent figure presented itself in my room. Caolchairn in full war paint.

"Why, you are as bejewelled as an old dowager going to Court," said I, gazing on him with respectful admiration. "You'd be worth something if you were melted down!"

MacLeish laughed merrily. He was in high spirits, as excited as any school-girl at the prospect of a dance: asked me no end of questions about the Miss Pryse-Davieses, and made me solemnly promise him introductions to all of them.

"By the way, I ought to have some money with me," I said, as we passed through the barrack gate. "We may want a cab home."

"Nonsense; it's a splendid night; besides, I've plenty." And he drew out his purse as he stood under the lamp. "No, it's all gold; what a nuisance!"

I noticed a pair of hungry eyes gleaming out of the darkness as he poured the money back, and saw a ragamuffin figure move slowly off. "Lucky there are two of us," I thought.

It was a brilliant little dance. The rooms were prettily and gaily decorated, the local confectioner had surpassed himself in the supper, and the Pryse-Davies girls looked as fresh and bright as if they had not passed a whole day under a broiling sun on the racecourse.

"Is this wise?" I asked Miss Winnie, as we stood in the open French window of the dining-room, that looked on to the Parade.

"What! the open air? Oh, it never does me any harm; and the moon is rising so exquisitely."

"I didn't mean that exactly, but is it safe to leave these windows open? Look at the mob out there. The races have brought all the vagabondage of the country together."

There was a small enclosure in front of the house, and over the dwarf wall a crowd of shabby-looking people were gazing in at the brilliantly lighted room.

"I'll send two of the men round to order them off," she said.

The last that departed looked round at me with the curious eager eyes I had seen before.

Meanwhile the fun was becoming rather fast and furious. They were getting up reels. One of the Highland officers had brought his bagpipes, on which the miscreant was a distinguished amateur performer. MacLeish was one of the noisiest and gayest there. I could hardly recognise the proud, reserved boy I knew. The Pryse-Davieses were bewitched with him and he with them.

"What has come to you, MacLeish?" I asked, when I came upon him, sitting in a dark corner alone, his face buried in his hands. He looked up with a queer, wild smile.

"I'm not mad, Jones, or melancholy. I'm *fey;* that's what it is."

"Come home now, there's a good fellow: it's past two, and you wanted to be early."

"Not a bit of it! I've a valse with Miss Winnie, and half-a-dozen other dances to dispose of."

The other men departed by degrees, but MacLeish stayed on to the last, and I with him.

I might have left him, but some instinct detained me. At last we took leave.

Our shortest way home was through the Lady's Avenue, and I took it without reflection. Half way through the grove MacLeish stopped. He had forgotten some nonsensical commission of one of the girls.

"I'll overtake you," he said. "I *must* go back."

I was too provoked with him to argue, but walked on, then sat down in the gloom on an overturned wheelbarrow and waited.

Some one passed me a few minutes later. He was in the full light of the moon, and I recognised the same shabby figure I had seen twice before—a young, broad-shouldered, slouching rough. He seemed to disappear suddenly behind one of the trees as a footstep approached, and MacLeish's voice was heard singing a valse tune. I caught a glimpse of his Glengarry and plaid as he crossed a streak of moonlight, and the next moment heard a sudden exclamation. Then came a scuffle—blows—and before I could reach them a heavy fall—a groan.

MacLeish was on his knees struggling to rise, held down in the grasp of a fallen man. He shook him off as I got up, and staggered to a tree, against which he leant panting and breathless.

"He tried to garotte me, and when I managed to twist out of his hands, dealt me a heavy blow on the head. I only struck him once, in self-defence. Is he damaged?"

I turned the fallen man over on his back. He lay still. I dragged him to the moonlight.

"MacLeish! He's *dead*."

But MacLeish had dropped on his knees beside him, and was gazing into the dead face with a face as ghastly.

"Fergus! Fergus MacLeish! Have we met? At last!"

He rose, erfectly panic-stricken. It was his cousin, he was assured, and, indeed, the likeness would have convinced me of the fact, without the additional evidence of the marked eyelid.

MacLeish was distraught with terror. It was murder he had done; he should die a felon's death. Nothing I could say would reassure him.

"Leave him here. Who's to know anything about him?" I said at last. "Sociey is well rid of him.——What on earth are you going to do now?"

He had seized one of the pickaxes left by the labourers, and was digging in fierce haste under the last elm tree.

"His grave was to be here," he said. "He came to show me the spot."

I suppose it was a mad thing to do, but seeing him resolved, I turned to with the spade and helped him. The earth being newly laid, was light and easily moved, and we soon made a trench deep enough for a grave. Then we laid the body gently down, and shovelled the earth in with feverish haste. The broad staring moon showed every pebble on the pathway, every stray leaf on the earth.

We removed all traces of the struggle, replaced the tools, and hurried home in utter silence.

MacLeish held out his hand without speaking as he stopped at his own door. I took it without hesitation. I am glad to remember *that.* He fixed his wild woeful eyes on me for a moment and then hurried away. I was too excited and horror-stricken to *think*, and I lay down, dreading the hours that had to pass before morning. Strange to say, I slept quietly and dreamlessly far into the next day, and when I awoke I could not realise the tragedy in which I had taken part.

"I've dreamed it all," I kept saying to myself; "and a dream is soon forgotten. I'll go and have a swim and then see if the Pryse-Davies girls are out on the Parade. It must be all a nightmare." Still, persuade myself as I might, there were two things I could not do: pass down the Avenue, or face MacLeish.

Where was he, I asked his servant. Gone to the ranges. I would go and meet the party returning. It would be best to get the first meeting over in public. I walked quietly along the pretty country lane, listening for the well-known crack of the rifles. All was silent. Then, at a turn of the road, I came suddenly upon a dozen figures or so walking slowly and silently. Four of them bore a hurdle, on which lay *something* with an officer's cloak thrown over it.

"What is it?" I asked; though I knew beforehand what the very words of the reply were going to be, somehow.

"Poor MacLeish! He was in the butts, and came out to look at the target; they had ceased firing at it. We were shooting at long range, and someone—I don't know who—fired at the wrong target. Shot through the heart—he dropped without a cry—stone dead."

I left Cinqhaven that night, and will never set foot there again as long as I live.

## HOW?

How was it that we met? Ah, well,
There really is not much to tell,
Nor can I quite remember now,
Without some doubt, exactly how
It happened—in what way;
For 'tis so many years ago.—
How many? Well, I hardly know,
Or hardly like to say.

I saw her standing in the glow
Of apple-blossoms hanging low,
And she was just as sweet and pure
As those bright blossoms, I am sure,—
Ay, sweeter, if you will.
But *how* it was I hardly know:
You see, 'twas many years ago—
And now she's sweeter still!

She says I spoke: I say that she
Said, "Lovely blossoms!" first to me;
But, anyway, I did not dare
To doubt that loveliness was there:
It shone on lip and brow;
But 'tis so many years ago,
That what we said I hardly know,
So can I tell you *how?*

But this to mind I clearly bring,
That some time after that sweet spring,
When apple trees were bearing fruit,
We went to church to mend our suit,
And knit two lives in one;
And though 'tis many years ago,
And much has happened since, I know
That mending was well done!

J. T. Burton Wollaston.

ROBERT BARNES.

R. AND E. TAYLOR.

THE ARGOSY.

*MARCH*, 1882.

# MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE HISTORY OF THE AGATES.

ON that same Saturday evening Philip Connell and Frank set off to call on Miss Agate, to ask what she had done with the lawyers.

They found the clean, threadbare house the same as usual, but this time the two ladies were at home. Evelyn was in high spirits, and very gracious in manner when Frank was introduced to her. She was glad she had not seen him before. Here was one human being whose first impression of her would not be of a deserted child, but of a mysterious foundling.

"I am certain something will come of it," she said, interrupting Gertrude's narrative. "I felt sure of it from the lawyer's manner. He was so respectful to me. I noticed two or three strong-boxes with titled names on them as we were led through the office: Dewe and Creed must be a first-rate firm. Nobody without considerable means would employ them to make inquiries."

Her thoughts were of the rank and wealth that might possibly be within her grasp: she seemed to have no recollection of the sufferings and sins which must certainly have underlain her mysterious history, nor any longing for the kindred love of which she had been so long deprived.

"I don't like to see Evelyn too hopeful," said Miss Agate, gravely. "I want her to remember that, at the very last, the lawyer said all we had told him conveyed nothing to him personally, but that it should be faithfully reported."

"People don't choose all their words with an eye direct to truth," answered Evelyn. "There are certain conventional phrases which come in handily on occasions, and mean little or nothing: and I believe that was one."

"Heyday, young lady!" cried Philip, "where did you get so much knowledge of the world?"

"I have had the pleasure of your acquaintance for a long time, sir," she retorted, with an arch curtsey.

She was certainly a handsome young woman, with her regular features, clear complexion and rich chestnut hair. She was well-dressed too, in a fashionably cut velveteen robe, with stiff frills at the throat and wrists. And yet, as Frank looked at her, a strange expression of disfavour crept across his face. Her very beauty and elegance only reminded him of the barmaid at the luncheon rooms which Philip Connell frequented, and whose pert familiarity had been very objectionable to one accustomed to the kindly respectfulness of the Raven maid-servants. The veneer might be a little thicker and smoother in Evelyn's case, but surely beneath lay the same coarse-grained nature, with all its vulgar self-appraisement and greed and falsity. Frank did not think these things: he only felt them—only reflected how different this girl was from that other girl he had met in the Ravenstoke lanes. It was one of the blessings of his simple nature that it had acute instincts.

"You might all leave me my hopes for a day or two, at any rate," she said, pouting. "Just because my sun seems peeping out, the clouds about me must begin to rain! Even our abigail, Mrs. Davies, has passed the day in a state of damp distress: which I am asked to believe arises solely from her fear of losing me! I believe she is always miserable, and is only glad of any excuse for letting it out."

"When you know poor Mary is so nervous and weak-minded," said Miss Agate, "you should have told her nothing till you were sure there was something to tell."

"Dear me," cried Evelyn, "I thought it was a good opportunity for letting her exercise her powers of dreams and signs and omens. And I was right too: she began directly we got in from the lawyer's office, telling me she must have fallen asleep over the kitchen fire, for she had had a dream."

"Did she relate it?" asked Philip.

"Oh yes," said Evelyn: "it ran that my people were discovered, and that, after all, nobody really belonged to me but my mother, and she was only a poor woman. And she said she distinctly saw me and my mother standing in front of each other in the dream, just as she and I were standing at that moment, and in her eagerness to see how I would act and behave, she awoke."

"Poor Mary Davies!" cried Miss Agate, "she has always been very fond of Evelyn. She was with me, you see, when I opened the door and found the baby on the step: we found her, as may be said, together. I never shall forget the state of excitement she went into: it was her way. And when once I had made up my mind to adopt the little girl, she seemed to think that, as our own child had

been stolen from our house already, there might be danger for this one, and mounted guard over it most assiduously. No wonder she has grown fond of Evelyn, and anxious almost to a mania for her welfare!"

"Ah, she is a faithful old retainer," remarked Philip, carelessly, the subject not much interesting him. "Was she with you at the time of your great trial?"

"No; not for some months after that. I had been inquiring at the shops for a young servant, and she presented herself. A timid, feckless thing, she seemed, poor and friendless, who would be glad to do anything for a bit of bread."

"Like many another London girl," put in Evelyn disdainfully.

"She was a country lass," said Miss Agate. "I caught up an impression that she had been in some trouble or sorrow in her country birth-place, and had come away to London out of it. She came from Alstock, in Surrey."

"That's not far from Ravenstoke," observed Frank, "though it's in another county."

"Did you never hear her history?" asked Philip.

"Never," said Miss Agate. "And I have grown to doubt whether she has any history to tell. I do not find enough employment for her myself, but the other people in the house do, and so—here she has stayed. She has never, to my knowledge, received a visitor or a letter all these twenty years. Nor has she ever taken a holiday."

"She looks merely a decent, doleful, affectionate, common-place woman," observed Philip.

"Exactly so," said Miss Agate, "and I have found her invaluable. My poor brother's peculiar condition demands that I have some very faithful, obedient ally—inclined to submission and silence. The lodgers like her, too: and some of them have been here many years. I have had to let my rooms, you know, to eke out my small income."

The confidences demanded by her morning interview with the lawyers seemed to have broken down Miss Agate's accustomed reserve. Never before had Philip Connell heard her allude directly to the skeleton in her home—her brother.

"Does Mr. Agate really see nobody?" he asked, genuine sympathy mingling with his curiosity, "or is an exception made in favour of Mary Davies?"

"He sees literally nobody but me," said Miss Agate with sad serenity. "I do all the work in his room, and take him the meals which Davies brings to his door. I don't think he is unhappy. These are habits he formed directly he was released from confinement."

"But how can he endure the awful monotony?" cried Philip.

"He seems quite absorbed in his classic authors," returned Miss Agate. "They were always the delight of his life. He writes well, too, and editors are glad of anything from his pen. I have made his room very bright and pretty," she continued after a pause. "It has

a long window opening on the garden, and I have had a strip walled off for his especial use. In summer time, when the leaves are thick, he walks up and down there for hours. Poor Theodore's mind has entirely returned to him—not quite the same, perhaps, but changed somewhat, as a person's constitution is often said to be changed when they recover from a high fever. He is not even eccentric in any little detail. He has not a single hallucination. Singularly excitable as his nerves are, so that the least sound or movement irritates them, he never imagines anything that does not exist. He could not bear anything now but perfect solitude. He dreads the sight of the outer world."

"I don't see what is the use of talking over these things," remarked Evelyn, coldly. "I have always admired your wisdom, Aunt Gertrude, for burying them in silence."

"There is no use," replied Miss Agate, "only, having had to discuss them with strangers to-day, makes it seem natural, I suppose, to speak of them with friends—unless indeed I weary you?" she added quickly, with ready self-rebuke.

"Weary us! No, indeed you do not," said Philip, warmly. "What a sad fate that poor young wife's was!"

"Ay," sighed Miss Agate, "dear Marian Snowe! If ever, as I have but now told you, there was a good sweet woman, she was one. I never thought my brother Theodore loved her half enough. And yet he could have married her for nothing but pure love. For she had no money, nor any family connections. She was only a governess. She adored Theodore. I used to say she spoiled him. And she was ever kind to me, and did me a great deal of good."

"She must not have had too bright a life from the beginning, being an orphan," remarked Philip.

"I daresay not," said Miss Agate. "But the lady who adopted her was good to her. Marian had never known her parents, but she thought much of them: she used to say she had ever tried to be good, so that when they should meet her in the next world they should have nothing to reproach her with."

"How good that was!" cried Frank involuntarily.

"Grand philosophy!" assented Philip, in his really genial spirit, but half-mocking words.

"Ah, yes, few were like her," sighed Miss Agate. "Theodore, in marrying Marian Snowe, gained a prize. Yet," she added, "there were people found to say that his marriage could not have been happy, for that, from his wedding-day, they had noticed him growing moody and morose."

"And was it so?"

"Well, I too had noticed him sorely changed from what he had been earlier; but in reality the change had begun long before his marriage. It seemed to me to set in while he was away from our house, acting as tutor in a gentleman's mansion in Surrey. After he

came home, I used to wonder if my philosophic, simple-minded brother had been so led away by the luxury in which he had lived there, as to become discontented with our plain ways at home. I felt terribly disappointed in him."

"It may have been so—that he was."

"Ah, no. Theodore's nature was above that. Afterwards, when it fell to my lot to go through his private diaries and papers, I discovered that at that period he had suffered losses and crosses, such as often darken or jar the finest minds. And he had in that mansion met with —— But I cannot go on: I have no right to," she broke off with a shiver.

None of her hearers spoke.

"After a short time he married," she resumed, evidently in pain. "And Marian's baby was born, and stolen away; stolen, I am quite certain, by the nurse she had hired. And then Theodore went mad. And Marian died of terror and woe. And since they let Theodore out of the asylum where they put him, he has lived shut in that back room and that strip of green garden."

What a history it was!

"Theodore speaks of Marian sometimes," Miss Agate went on, in a low, awed voice. "He speaks of her as we speak of the dead with whom we have had sweet, happy days. But he has never mentioned the baby, or the manner of Marian's death. Of course, he knows he has been in a lunatic asylum, for he was a sane man before he left it. And I sometimes think that if any horror of the past flits across his mind, he may attribute it to a memory of his own delirious ravings. He never speaks of the time of his madness. And then, you know," she added, "a year after the time my little nephew was lost, my Evelyn was found."

"You need not go into that, Aunt Gertrude," said Evelyn, quite touchily. "I am sure you have explained all about it to Mr. Connell over and over again, asking his advice and that, as to how my relatives might be discovered. And it cannot interest Mr. Frank Raven," she added, with a little toss of her head.

Nothing about Evelyn Agate interested Frank, and so he did not contradict, which probably annoyed her.

"Yours has been a hard life, Miss Agate," said Philip thoughtfully.

"Possibly so," she replied.

"And entirely self-sacrificing."

"Not entirely. No."

"Oh, but it has. It has kept you single. But for all the burden you have had to carry I am sure you would have married."

Miss Agate shook her head with a grave smile. "Many people do not marry," she said. "And certainly, with my poor brother to keep and to care for, my duty was clear."

"Especially clear, as it only cost the entire sacrifice of yourself," repeated Philip drily.

"Aunt Gertrude is exactly the sort of woman who never does get married," observed Evelyn. "I daresay she is happier as she is."

"What sort of women are they who *do* get married?" asked Philip, and Evelyn coloured.

"There's the postman!" she exclaimed, as a double knock was heard: and she sprang from her chair and hurried out.

"Poor Evelyn!" sighed Gertrude Agate, "I'm afraid I cannot have given her a very happy youth, for I think she'd be dreadfully ready to leave me. Had my dear Marian lived, she might have been able to train her into something more nearly resembling herself."

"That poor Marian is on your list of saints," said Philip, kindly.

"And she was a saint. As nearly so as a woman can be."

Evelyn returned. "The letter is for you, Aunt Gertrude," she said in a disappointed tone, as she handed the missive to Miss Agate. "I see it is from the lawyers by the seal, and so I think they might have directed it to me as it must be about my business. Oh, I wonder whether it is good news! I wonder what they have discovered?"

"That you are a Duchess's daughter perhaps," said Philip, gravely, as Miss Agate opened it, and read:

"DEAR MADAM,—We regret that, on our communicating to our client the particulars you kindly gave us this morning, we were informed that they did not in the least suit the case in hand.

"We deeply regret having put you to the trouble of calling on us and the pain of answering our questions,

"And remain, yours truly,

"DEWE AND CREED."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Evelyn. Mortification reddened her cheeks, suppressed rage lay in her voice. The blow of disappointment had shivered the veneer of her nature. She no longer looked handsome. Even her velveteen robe seemed to grow common and tawdry. But ambition had been aroused within her and could not be suppressed again. If these people hold no clue to her birth, others might hold one. And, indeed, who was to know whether these lawyers told truth or not. Perhaps they did not choose to speak yet, that the time for it was not come. She said something of this aloud.

"Perhaps so," assented Miss Agate calmly. "Meanwhile, Evelyn, my dear, you must be content to wait."

"Yes, Aunt Gertrude, but not here. I shall put an advertisement in the *Times* now for a situation as Lady's Companion. I will write it out this very night."

## CHAPTER X.

### MRS. RAVEN ADVERTISES.

MRS. RAVEN returned to Ravenstoke by an afternoon train on the Saturday, which enabled her to reach the Court in time for a late dinner. She had taken her comings and goings on this occasion quite into her own hands, having given directions that no carriage should be sent to await her at the station, and that, if she were not home in time, dinner need not be kept for her. She re-appeared, however, sooner than was expected, and it was thought she could not have had much time in London. Charity Hale, who met her in the hall, took the liberty of expressing her surprise as she followed her to her dressing-room.

"You are soon at home again, madam," she said, looking at Mrs. Raven, with her keen, peering eyes. "It was nice that you should get through your business so quickly."

"I did not get through it at all," said Mrs. Raven. "I didn't succeed to-day, Charity."

"Oh, what a pity, ma'am," cried Charity. "Shall you have to take that weary journey again? Could not somebody else do it for you? What is hard and tiring for a lady like you, might be quite easy to some people—say, to the likes of me. If, indeed, it is business that you could entrust to others."

"Has anything happened — or anybody called — during my absence?" asked Mrs. Raven, passing over Charity's words, and keeping her back towards her while she hastily made the few slight toilet arrangements necessary for a tête-à-tête dinner with her son.

"The Vicar has been, ma'am. He took lunch with master. James Sloam waited on them, and he says the parson talked a deal about Master Frank, and seemed rare fond of him.—I knew that would please you, ma'am," added Charity, as though Mrs. Raven had smiled—which she had not.

"James Sloam must learn that it is no part of a page's duty to chatter over what he hears at table," coldly replied Mrs. Raven. "I hope you reminded him of that."

"James Sloam will learn his duty in time, ma'am: he wouldn't talk over things to anybody but me," said the old woman. "I'll warrant he'd not say a word even to his own father, knowing that there are times when Eldred's wits go out."

"No other visitor?" said Mrs. Raven, chafing under the woman's words—as she often had to chafe. But she rarely checked Charity Hale.

"No, ma'am," answered Charity. "The Squire—he's been going about, putting things to rights or wrongs, according as people may think. Everything is going to be cleared up and cleaned out."

"Has he been down at the Vale Cottages, about those pigsties?" asked Mrs. Raven.

"I think so," said Charity. "I'm mortal feared we'll have a fever break out if they are touched. To my idea stirring dangerous stuff to get it away is more likely to breed pestilence than leaving it at peace to waste away in the course of nature. But then I know that the letting it alone is only the way of poor, ignorant folk, and gentry can't be expected to abide it. The gentry canna let things be. It is only low people who would leave a cur sleeping, sooner than get a bite from him."

Mrs. Raven said nothing in reply. It had not occurred to her, while she turned her back on the old woman, that Charity could watch her face reflected in the mirror. But as she suddenly moved away, the old woman's image displaced her own in the looking-glass, and she caught a strange smile lurking about the thin lips. Quitting the room without a word, she left Charity standing in it.

Mrs. Raven went straight to the dining-room, though the gong had not yet sounded. The table was already spread, and the lamps were burning dimly, for the setting sun had still left a strong glory in the heavens above the belt of firs which bounded the horizon in that direction. Mrs. Raven lingered at the window, looking out, but seeing nothing. She had stood so for ten minutes before the gong sounded and her son came in.

He greeted her with a surprised, cold exclamation: "Are you back so soon?" and went straight to his seat. She lingered a moment beside him as she passed to her place. But he was unfolding his napkin and did not even look towards her. Kissing and clasping hands were not among the habits of the house. Mrs. Raven herself had checked Frank in those manifestations, and Leonard had never attempted them.

The meal was very silent. The page, James Sloam, was not in attendance, only the old butler, Budd, and a footman who went in and out of the room carrying dishes.

"I did not expect you could get back so soon," remarked her son. "Did you carry out your appointment?"

"Oh yes," she said in a slow indifferent tone, pausing to indicate her wish for some condiment on the table. "Oh yes, and it was very wearisome to find how easy it seemed to get at everything but what one wanted. I don't think I shall look out for it any more."

"I'm afraid you had not sufficiently defined ideas of what you did want," observed Leonard.

She looked across the table with a sudden flash in her grey eyes. But she said nothing. She was only too thankful if he would let the subject drop thus, until they were alone.

When the meal was over, they both rose: Leonard rarely stayed to drink wine, and he instantly went to the little writing-table in the corner, and began to sum up figures in some account-book. He had got

into the habit of using this writing-table during his father's life time, when the Squire required the apartment which was called the study; though the only books in it were a few agricultural works and some legal treatises on the position of landlord and tenant.

The butler proceeded to clear the table, wondering why his mistress did not retire as usual to the drawing-room. She could not find heart to go there; she knew Leonard would not follow her till a late hour, and to-night she felt so lonely—and it was so large and drear. She asked the old servant to bring her work-basket to her here. Budd obeyed, still wondering.

Leonard went on with his accounts, and Mrs. Raven stitched in silence. She had made up her mind that he should speak first, and his delay fretted her. It argued indifference and even contempt for a matter which she had led him to believe was eating away her heart. She knew that she meant to take a new cue now—and a false one—and she feverishly hoped he would readily accept her shifted position. And yet it nettled her to know that he had not heartily entered into her first standpoint.

Suddenly he wheeled his chair about, and spoke. "I've done now. There's really nothing like getting everything stated in detail. I have struck forty pounds off the building estimates for the row of new cottages in Pond Lane, simply by finding that the porches cost that sum, and need not be added. And now, mother, tell me all about your interview in London. Whom did you see—and what did you find out?"

"I saw both the partners in the firm," she said, spreading her work on her knee and nervously folding and unfolding it. "And really it was very interesting—and painful. But there was nothing to act upon, and I may as well say at once, Leonard, that all I heard to-day does not induce me to prosecute the inquiry. There are more mysteries in the world than we are apt to imagine," she added, having kept her eyes down while she spoke.

"I am inclined to think there is no mystery here except in your imagination," returned Leonard, firmly. "You remember I have said so from the beginning. But if it really has had a strong hold on you all these years, I cannot understand your keeping it to yourself until now."

"I kept silence," she said slowly, "for many reasons. First, because I doubted my own powers of judgment, even as you doubt them now. I was in the first weakness of my confinement when the suspicion came ——"

"Still, it was but a suspicion, and no proof: you admit that," interrupted Leonard.

"Of course," said Mrs. Raven—and there she stopped to cough. "It shows my powers of self-command, that I gave it no word then. I argued with myself that if it were unreasonable, any whisper of doubt would create unnecessary scandal, but that if it were reasonable

some better time would serve as well. And then your father was so proud of the fine healthy baby—and you, Leonard, were still so delicate—and he used to impress me with the vastness of the blessing which had at last given a hopeful heir to his old family line."

There was a pause. Both were thinking.

"But Frank certainly has a Raven look, though he has not the Raven hair," observed Leonard, glancing at Gilbert Raven's portrait on the wall. Leonard had not loved his father, nor had he, either by nature or training, any fine instincts or principles of morality. If Frank was not Mrs. Raven's son, there seemed one easy way of accounting for his introduction into the family circle.

"I thought of that, too," said the widow, lowering her voice as she caught Leonard's unspoken thought. "I reflected that to breathe any doubt was to cast a slur on my husband's honour; and I felt sure that any such slur could not attach to him, that he was not one to deserve it. No, that could never have been true, Leonard: so I made up my mind to bear in silence. You, my own boy, lived and flourished; why should I disturb the peace of the family by what seemed so like a whim?"

"Why, indeed," remarked Leonard.

"But, then," resumed Mrs. Raven, "look at your father's strange will! What did it mean? *I* marvelled; had he, too, had his doubts, and kept them secret? And anything that gave colour to my old suspicion could only arouse a craving that had always accompanied it, to put, if possible, the uncertainty at rest; and so I spoke to you, Leonard. If Frank be not my child—where is my child?"

"Dead, probably, if it was indeed taken from you," said Leonard coolly. "I'm sure it is a miracle I lived, with the utmost skill and attention lavished on me. I believe that you have built up the whole story from a craze that got into your head when you were half delirious, mother—and your long-kept-up reticence served but to nourish it. How could such a thing be done—your own child changed for another—unless those about you were treacherous?"

"True," she faintly responded.

"As for my father's will, I don't think there was anything so very peculiar about it, and what there was, points in a different direction from your fancy. Frank was undoubtedly my father's favourite, and his arrangement, I think, shows how much he trusted your love for Frank. Would he have done so, had he any reason for guessing that you might, sooner or later, discover his favourite to be but a changeling? For I know Frank *was* my father's favourite: he never cared for me," Leonard repeated frankly.

"All you say is very reasonable, Leonard," said his mother, softly. "So reasonable, that it confirms me in the wisdom of my decision to stop in this quest. Since you think as you do, you will be glad to hear that I told the lawyers to make no further inquiries."

"That's all right," said Leonard; "had you found it practicable

to air your fancy years ago, you would have abandoned it long ago; that's my opinion. I suppose ventilation is as necessary for people's minds as for their houses. And considering how hard it is to reconcile them to it in the latter, I expect they keep their former in a terribly stuffy state."

"I suppose I had better make a full confession while I am about it," she went on in a strange low tone; which, to any ear less obtuse than her son's, would have conveyed the idea of caressing, almost cringing, entreaty. "All these years, especially when I felt disappointed by Frank's strong, restless, active boyishness, I have allowed my imagination to dwell on that (possibly) lost child of my own. I always picture it a girl. You see, in my own mind, I could picture it anything I liked, and it was easier to dream of a daughter as my sympathising companion in all my lonely walks and works."

"It is a great pity you never had a daughter of your own, mother," said Leonard.

"I have had a very solitary life," cried Mrs. Raven, with a sudden passion which startled even Leonard, while she went on with what seemed strangely like self-vindication against some invisible accuser. "I believe I should have been quite a different creature had I lived the crowded, sunshiny life of most women. They are not good or happy thoughts which come by brooding! And now," she added after a moment's pause, and with a sudden return to her ordinary manner, "my life is lonelier than ever. Though your father spent so much time in the open air, and though Frank had so little in common with me, yet their absence leaves a great blank. I have made up my mind that Frank must be got home as quickly as possible, and brought to a better understanding with us. But it is not likely he will ever settle down here; he will only come and go. And in these silent days I am getting haunted by the idea of this daughter I have so long fancied I might have had."

Leonard could not quite understand his mother.

"Do not check me for speaking out this fresh folly, Leonard, when you have just blamed me for concealing another. I must have some sort of companionship; some young girl here who will love me."

"What do you want to do?" Leonard inquired, rather unsympathetically.

"I am thinking of advertising for a lady companion," she said, rising from her chair, and bending over a vase of flowers on a stand, "but I would not do such a thing without consulting you."

"Why not?" asked Leonard. "What right have I to interfere in your wishes?"

"You will have to tolerate her in the family," said his mother. "She must sit at table with us. It will be a great boon to me if you can endure it, and if I find a person who suits me, we shall be well accustomed to each other by the time I have to leave here and go to

the dower-house—when you marry." She had come round to his side, and laid both her hands on his shoulder.

"There will be no hurry for that," he observed.

"And promise me one thing, Leonard," she went on, "and do not be angry with me for exacting the promise."

"What is it?" he asked.

"That you will not be led away into falling in love with any young person I may hire."

Leonard laughed. "That is easily promised, mother. If I ever marry, I have made up my mind to marry enough money to buy the Overhill estate: the land would lie so well with mine. You needn't be afraid for me. But if you've made up your mind to have Frank at home again, that will be a different matter. He is sure to do the wrong thing and leave undone the right."

"Frank is not you," remarked his mother, coldly. "He will never be anything but a second son."

"I don't know that you are wise in wanting to bring him much about this house now," reflected Leonard. "Whenever I do marry, he must go, of course; and the less he has grown to regard Raven as his head-quarters when that time comes, the better for us both."

"You have always so much common sense, Leonard," said Mrs. Raven, wearily. "But you must yield to me in this, my dear. I must have Frank here once more—not as a guest, knowing when he is to go, but as an inmate. I have been vainly telling myself that I *must* be his mother for the last twenty-two years, and just as I began to leave off so doing, the mother yearning has come," she added, with a piteous smile. "He will not interfere with you. And I must have my companion, too. I have your permission and your promise as to *her*, have I not, Leonard?"

"Certainly," he answered. "Both were alike unnecessary."

"Then, as this has been a fatiguing day and I feel tired, I will go to my room," she said, rising. "Good night, Leonard."

"Good night, mother," he responded, and opened the door for her to pass out.

"I never thought her nerves could have shaken so," reflected Leonard as he returned to his seat. "Why, she looks as if she had just recovered from a fever. I ought to have put my veto on all this imaginary nonsense when she first mentioned it. But she pleaded as plausibly on the one side then, as she pleads to-night on the other. And then, too, I am quite sure she had her suspicions of—of my father. It is indeed high time she had a companion; and when she gets one, I must send them both away for change of air and scene."

Mrs. Raven went to her room, it is true, but she did not go to her bed. She opened her desk, and sat down before it.

She wanted a companion: how was she to discover one? True, the want had been suggested to her by hearing that Evelyn Agate wished to go out as such. She wanted *her*.

We can act upon what we hear: but what we overhear may paralyse us. We can scarcely act upon a knowledge we ought not to have possessed. How were the demand and the supply to be brought together?

She had Miss Agate's address. She had seen it on the note the lawyer had shown her, and there was no fear of her forgetting it. But it was impossible to write to a stranger, inquiring if any member of her family wished to become a lady's companion. Such a course would be certainly both impertinent and suspicious, sure to defeat its own ends. It was equally impossible to communicate with Miss Agate through the solicitors.

No: there was no direct path to attain her wish. There was nothing to be done, save write a tempting advertisement and send it to the newspapers. If Evelyn Agate really wished for such a situation, she would be sure to search them. And Mrs. Raven proceeded to draw one up.

She tried to make it as pleasant as possible. She lingered over its composition almost lovingly, touching and re-touching again and again. The result stood thus.

"Wanted, by a lady of position, having no daughters, a young lady to act as companion. A beautiful country home and a liberal salary are offered, and she will be treated with motherly kindness and consideration." And applications were requested to be addressed to the chief library in the neighbouring county town, Standchester.

Mrs. Raven wrote six copies of this before she went to bed—each to be forwarded to an eligible London newspaper.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE LODGER AT THE PITCHFORK.

Mrs. Raven made no concealment of her advertisement. She rang for her maid, and gave the letters into her keeping, to be carried to the letter-rack, against the postman brought his bag on the Monday morning.

Thus the whole household had the opportunity of seeing the waiting letters, and they made their comments.

"Six newspapers!" exclaimed Mrs. Sims, the housekeeper, as she sat at the breakfast-table of the upper servants on this same Monday morning. "What can the mistress have to say to six newspapers?"

"Charity Hale knows," said one of the others, noticing the sly pursing of the old woman's thin lips. "Charity Hale knows everything—only she never tells."

"A still tongue makes a wise head," croaked Charity.

"Mrs. Raven may be advertising for a furnished house at a water-

ing place," suggested the butler. "She needs a change; she has seemed poorly ever since the Squire died."

"What did she go to London for on Saturday?" cried Sims. "To see a house agent, perhaps? She seemed to have been looking for something, I thought, when she came home, and to have got downcast because she did not get it."

"It's more likely she's going to make changes here," hazarded Fanny, the only young domestic present; "get brisker servants, or something. How would you like *that*, Mrs. Sims?"

"I don't think that," put in Budd: "hold your silly tongue, girl."

"Well," said the girl, pertly, "it is hardly likely the changes that are said to be afloat out of doors, will stop there."

"They are to go on briskly enough there, I fancy," admitted the butler. "It's said that one of the first to be sent off the estate will be Eldred Sloam."

"What, out of his cottage!" cried the housekeeper.

Mr. Budd nodded. "I heard the master say as much to Mr. Toynbee on Saturday when I was waiting on them at lunch."

Charity set down her cup of tea and gave a little cough, as if she had narrowly escaped choking. "It was not you who waited at lunch on Saturday," she said to the butler, snappishly; "it was James Sloam."

"It was I at first—until James came in. As to Sloam, he'd not be a loss to anybody if he did go: unless it was to James. And not to him, either, that I see. That the lad has grown up a good and decent lad, though a bit soft, is no thanks to his father. A nice example *he* has set him!"

"You are right there, Mr. Budd," assented Mrs. Sims. "James takes after his mother, poor body. She was a plain girl, but as true-hearted as you'd wish. She was in the still-room here when I came first; one of those quiet girls that don't get noticed much. Eldred Sloam used to be coming here, after her, I thought; and there was something about the man that I did not like, handsome though he was. 'Don't you have aught to say to him, Jane,' I said to her; ay, more than once. But in spite of all I could do or say, the silly girl married him."

"Oh," flippantly remarked Fanny. "Pity is akin to love, they say."

"Pity is the back-door of love, I say," retorted Mrs. Sims, "and it's not the best of characters that enter that way. And so poor Jane found to her cost. She had to put up with Eldred Sloam for eleven years, with his ill-doings and his temper, and all that while she never said a true word against him in anger, nor a false one of praise out of pride. I was with her when she died, poor body, and I've always taken an interest in her boy James for her sake. It's not much his father has taken, more shame for him."

"He is a rare good-looking man yet, *I* think, is Eldred Sloam,"

put in Fanny aggressively, simply because she liked to retort on the elder servants.

"As Squire Eldred Raven was before him," cried Charity Hale.

"Maybe—with a difference, though," said Mrs. Sims. "Squire Eldred looked like a gentleman, for all his wild ways, as I've heard say many times; this man looks like a dauntless ne'er-do-well."

"Eldred Sloam would have been a different man if he had had the luck to get the right sort of wife," said Charity, with asperity. "Instead of a soft thing like Jane."

"And that a man like him takes care not to get," said Mrs. Sims. "The right sort for him wouldn't have been a Christian English woman, but a wild Tartar. If ever a man deserved to be served out himself for what he has brought on others, it's Eldred Sloam. Look at the story told about that poor young girl—what was her name?—Hester Walker—some years before!"

"What was that?" asked Fanny, eagerly.

"There are stories and things one don't care to talk of in public," put in the butler hastily, who may have thought it time to interfere. It was somewhat difficult, however, to arrest Mrs. Sims' tongue, once it was fairly set going.

"You needn't be afraid, Mr. Budd. I know, I hope, what things may be said and what may not. A young lass came into the place from some one of the villages near to take service with the Miss Maynes—two ladies who lived at Cross Cottage. Her name was Hester Walker: as nice a little girl as you'd see, Mrs. Fisher says. And Eldred, he was soon after her, and everybody thought he was going to get married that time—they had thought it before, you see. By-and-by the lass took to go about crying; her mistresses could not make it out. One day she came to them and said she must go home, that her mother had sent for her, and she packed her trunk and went—and it put out the old ladies dreadfully. They were frightened and angry and they let her go."

"And what became of her?" asked Fanny, eagerly.

"Ah—what? Who knows? A week or two afterwards the mother came over to Cross Cottage to see her daughter, not hearing from her latterly, she told the ladies. She had not seen Hester, and did not know she had left her situation. A fine to-do it made. Everybody laid the blame at Eldred Sloam's door, saying he had kidnapped her, though Mrs. Fisher always did believe him, and always will, when he declared he did not know what had become of that girl. He says so to this day. Jane knew that story, mind you; for I took care to repeat it all to her, word for word, just as Mrs. Fisher related it to me. But it did no good: Jane wouldn't believe a word of it."

"She didn't think anybody had invented it, did she?" asked Charity, with a sneer. "Who's this, bursting in?"

The door was flung back with a bound, and the page, James Sloam, entered. His broad, plebeian face certainly owed nothing to any

presumed aristocratic blood on his father's side. But its coarse plainness was redeemed by the frankness and kindness of its expression. Sent by the coachman on an early errand to the village, he had there met, as was evident, with something to excite him.

"Does anybody here believe in witches?" he asked, as he stood with open mouth and eyes, before the company.

"What do you mean by talking of witches?" croaked Charity severely.

"There's a witch at the Pitchfork," answered the lad. "I went over there about the straw, and Giles the ostler told me of her."

"Don't you go and be friendly with the Pitchfork—or with its ostler either," advised Mrs. Sims. "If the late Squire had been of my opinion, he'd not have allowed any tavern in the place, save the old respectable White Hart. That Pitchfork *is* a beauty. What did Giles say about a witch?"

"She doesn't call herself a witch, ma'am, Giles said; she calls herself a—some queer word—a—a clear-voyer," stammered Jem.

"A clairvoyante," exclaimed the butler. "Oh, then, that's a different thing. Clairvoyance is scientific. Leastways, it's said to be a new power, sprung up of late years."

"Giles says she does not want to do any clear-voying here," resumed James. "She only told them she was one that they might not be frightened if she took a queer sort of fit. She's a foreigner, from Egypt, they think: a big, dark woman, fair spoken. Well, the missis at the Pitchfork, hearing this, was taken with a wish to know something about her brother that went to sea and never came back. And Worsfold, he said to his wife, 'Of course she could tell you something about your brother—I could do that myself,' said he, 'but how are you going to decide whether it's true or not."

"There's more sense in Worsfold than one would have thought," remarked Mrs. Sims.

"The missis saw the force of that," said James, "and she thought it over. 'Suppose,' says she to Worsfold, 'we was to ask her to tell us all she can about us, saying ne'er a word ourselves; then, if she speaks truth about what we do know, surely we may trust her to speak it about what we don't.' And so up she went to the lodger, and they had a deal of talking together; and the master, Giles says, was waiting anxious at the bottom of the stairs. But she brought no news down. The clear-voyer wouldn't do anything then—or couldn't, maybe, thinks Giles. She told the missis she did not want to do anything in this place, Ravenstoke, because there was evil in the air."

"Like her impudence!" exclaimed Mrs. Sims.

"That set the missis on, more eager than ever, Giles says: he's not sure that it didn't set the master. She went up again to the clear-voyer and told her she'd make it well worth her while; but the clear-voyer answered at once that if she spoke of money it would spoil

her gift altogether: that what she did, she did for love—to help people, never for money."

"Come, that looks honest. What next, James?"

"And at last she promised that she'd do her best by-and-by. And a precious puzzling best it is, Giles says. Yesterday afternoon, when all was quiet about the place, being Sunday, the clear-voyer had 'em up to her room, Worsfold and his wife both, with the blinds pulled close down, and she said the fit was coming on and presently she'd go off quite insensible, and in that state tell them what they wanted to know. Sure enough she did go off, and began to talk in her sleep as it were, and they both listened, all in a fright like, to what she said. She lay back with her eyes shut, giving one or two little snores or gasps; and the missis she crept to the door and let in Dolly the maid, and Giles himself stood all eager to hear outside."

"Best to have witnesses in such unearthly doings," nodded Sims.

"They all sat as still as mice," continued James, "till she began to mutter. And then, Giles thinks they got more than they bargained for. For not only did the clear-voyer tell of the missis's brother that went to sea, but she told why he went—to get out of the way after stealing the old schoolmaster's hens. Which was true enough."

"My patience!" ejaculated Fanny. James went on.

"The queer thing was, she didn't tell things right plain out, but said she saw him among birds in a yard—and then running round a corner and looking, scared, behind him; and then on a big ship; and last of all, lying stretched out, under a great tree, of some strange sort such as she'd never seen before. But more than that. She told how Worsfold's father had been drowned in a mill-dam—a noisy water with a big wheel going round, she called it. She even let on how he'd been drinking too much before it happened. Giles said his blood ran cold, for he thought she might be reading out next how he went to the cellar last Christmas and helped himself to the brandy: and Dolly, he says, looked on her part awful queer."

James's present listeners did not know what to make of this, or how to take it. "Is that all?" they asked.

"No, it is not all," answered the boy, impressively. "For she went on, talking about the evil in the air, that which is past and that which is coming: and next she seemed to see a tall figure that walks at night between the Court and the cottage—and Giles says there couldn't well be any mistake that she meant father's cottage. It had walked at times for years and years, she said, and it wasn't laid yet, and no living mortal could foresee when it would be."

Mrs. Sims, taking the bacon-dish from the table at the moment, let it drop in consternation.

"Did she speak of *that*, James? Mercy preserve us! Did she say—did she say what the figure was like?"

"Not much of that, I think," answered the lad. "Only that he

had a red mark on his neck; and she could see him turn round about, she said, and shake his fist at the Court."

"That woman's nothing canny, you may be sure," spoke Charity Hale. "Witch, or no witch, she must have dealings"—and the old nurse paused with a meaning shiver—"dealings underground. As to the figure—it has not been seen lately."

"I don't know that," corrected the butler. "Mrs. Fisher, at the White Hart, tells a tale of some young lady, staying there recently for the night, being frightened by a queer-looking character that she met by starlight on that same road. Or moonlight—I forget which she said. The young lady spoke about it to Mrs. Fisher, and the landlady, in her turn, spoke to me."

James went on. "When the clear-voyer came to her senses, Worsfold hinted that they'd be ready to pay her well for what she had done, and that he did not intend to take any score from her. But she bade him hold his tongue: that she should pay him as she paid other inn-keepers; and she reminded him that she took no pay for what she was enabled to tell. She speaks real haughty, Giles says, and has such a grand manner with her."

"I wonder," slowly deliberated Mr. Budd, "why she should have come to the Pitchfork at all?"

"The curious thing is, sir, Giles says, that his missis is not a bit easier in her mind about her brother than she was before. First thing this morning she and Worsfold fell out over it, she saying the clear-voyer's words meant that Tom is resting himself on some desert island, maybe after his labours in digging up gold, and that he'll hail a ship some day and come home and make their fortunes. But he says it's meant that Tom is stretched out stark and cold at the bottom of the sea, among the corals and things that grow there; and that he should always have thought so without being told, but for knowing that his brother-in-law, Tom, was one of those unlucky people that escape drowning for hanging."

"And as that is all you have to tell, I suppose, James," cried Mrs. Sims, "you can go into the pantry and set about your duties."

It appeared the signal for the rest to rise, and to go about theirs. Presently no one was left in the room, save Mrs. Sims and the lady's-maid, Janet Mackay: a staid, respectable Scotchwoman, who had not very long come into service at the Court. Naturally reticent and cautious, she had listened to the conversation in silence.

"There has been a good deal said that you don't understand, I suppose?" began the housekeeper to her presently.

"In truth I don't," answered Janet. "That allusion to a figure that walks between the Court and Eldred Sloam's—is it a ghost?"

"Supposed to be. The ghost of Squire Eldred Raven. And good cause his spirit has to walk that road: he walked it too often in his lifetime."

"How so?"

"That cottage of Sloam's was the laundry in those days; and where there is a laundry there is generally a laundry-maid, you know, and she is sometimes pretty. Perhaps I had better tell you the story from the beginning."

"If you would. I have felt puzzled sometimes at these allusions."

"Squire Eldred Raven, a fine, handsome man as was ever seen, I hear, but wild and careless as to conduct, lived here, a bachelor. His brother, Captain Raven, was with his regiment in India; news came that he was killed in battle, and the Squire here wrote to tell the widow she had better come home—her little son would be his heir, you see, unless he married, himself. The poor lady, weakened by sorrow, was not strong enough to undertake the voyage, but she sent the little boy, Henry. Charity Hale, a young woman then, became his nurse, and the Squire grew very fond of the child ——"

"I beg your pardon for interrupting the story," spoke Janet. "That child, Henry—was it our late master who has just died?"

"To be sure it was. After a bit, the lady started from India with her other child, a baby-girl, but she died on the voyage, poor thing, and only the little girl arrived—Miss Millicent, she that's Mrs. Connell now. Well, after a time, a younger sister of Charity Hale's came into service here, to do light things—not rough work. Never such a contrast hardly seen, I've heard, as there was between her and Charity. Charity, plain in face, crabbed, prim, and with all the ways of a servant; Salome, pretty and bright and ladylike, though always idle and flighty. Some whim took Charity after a bit to put her sister into the laundry, to learn to iron, and Salome went there to the old widow Sloam, who was head of it. By-and-by, people began to talk. They asked what it was that Squire Eldred wanted at the laundry-house in an evening—for he would be seen going there. Well, it was the old tale, Janet; and the next thing that appeared at the laundry was a baby—this very Eldred Sloam."

"Eldred *Sloam?* I do not understand."

"The poor child had no right to any name in particular, you see, so they called him that for want of a better, and it was like his mother's Christian name. It was said that Charity took him to church and had him named Eldred—which was like her impudence. She did it out of spite, perhaps; for she really loved Salome, and the discovery drove her nearly mad. Salome never held up her head again; the disgrace had tried her. Before she was anything like well, she left the cottage, running away from it one morning betimes, escaping from Squire Eldred and his wiles. The Squire went in search of her, and found her; in London, as was said, but nobody knew where for certain. In a month or two's time she was back again at the old cottage with Mrs. Sloam. The laundry had then been removed to the back premises here, where it is still, and Mrs. Sloam had the cottage without the work, and attended to the baby,

Eldred. Well, Janet, in time there came another baby, and poor Salome died when it was born."

"Died!"

"And in two or three days afterwards, Squire Eldred was dead."

Janet Mackay nearly screamed.

"It was said he was the worse for liquor; I don't know if that's true; but he was on horseback, and the horse grew restive and ran away and threw him. He was killed on the spot. And it happened on the very walk that he took so often in his life-time, for the horse was dashing madly across it, and he fell right in the path."

"What a dreadful thing!"

"The little nephew, Henry, succeeded to all the property. His trustees allowed Mrs. Sloam, who had charge of the boy, Eldred, to retain the house, and paid her some money weekly. Whether they did it out of a feeling of justice, or whether Squire Eldred had ever said to his lawyer that he wished it done in case of ill happening to him, was not known. When Squire Henry came of age, he continued to do the same thing—to the widow Sloam until her death, and then to the man Eldred—not liking, I take it, to root up old institutions. It is whispered now, though, that the new Squire intends to stop the weekly allowance and to turn the man from the cottage. Eldred Sloam is no credit to the place, but *I* shouldn't."

"What was it they meant about a red mark on the neck?"

"Squire Eldred had a large curious red mark on his neck, was born with it. Not but what the Squire was red all over; and he had the Raven red hair, and so had Squire Henry: and so has Eldred Sloam."

"And the present master also," said Janet.

"The present master! The young master's is reddish in a way, but his is no more like the real Raven hair than withered grass is like full-eared corn."

"What became of Salome Hale's last baby?"

"It was fetched away by some of poor Salome's people and has never been heard of since. I daresay it's dead; 'twas a little girl. Charity couldn't take it, you see, being here at the Court, even if she would. That past business just soured her for life, and has made her the cynical woman she is. The Hales were superior people, you see, till this happened, above the run of common servants, and the disgrace told upon them. There was another sister, I believe, but she didn't live in these parts."

"It is a sad history," was the comment of Janet Mackay.

"Charity liked the Squire who has just gone; it seems to me that she quite resents his death, if you can understand such a thing," concluded Sims. "But she does not like Mr. Leonard: and there has never been any love lost between her and Mrs. Raven."

"And what became of the sister—the little lady from India?"

"Miss Millicent Raven—oh, she grew up here with her brother. After Squire Eldred's death the trustees got a lady to come here to

superintend the children; she was some relation, I've heard, of their mother. A nice lady she was, good and capable, but she died close upon Miss Millicent's marriage. Miss Millicent's name is not often mentioned in the house. She married to please herself; he was only a dissenting minister, a worthy gentleman, I believe, but not high enough for the Ravens. The Squire thought she might have done better, and was very angry: he and his sister never met after her marriage. It was her son who came down here for a few days last autumn for the shooting."

"What! That light-hearted young barrister?"

"Yes. Mr. Philip Connell."

## CHAPTER XII.

### MRS. RAVEN DOES HER DUTY.

When Charity left the servants' hall, she went straight towards Mrs. Raven's apartments. That lady was seated behind her davenport in the boudoir, making out a list of some valuable family lace, before laying it away until her days of mourning should be ended. She looked up when the door opened—and her eyes and Charity's met. The lady's fell.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said Charity, in her smooth, acid tones. "Do you want me this morning?"

Mrs. Raven went on with her writing, but her hand trembled, and she found a strange difficulty in spelling such a simple word as fichu.

"Presently, Charity," she said. "I wish to arrange some of my drawers this morning: your good memory and tidy touch are just what I require. I want a great deal of such help now-a-days. Do you know, Charity, I am thinking of taking a young lady-companion."

"Indeed, madam," said Charity, "that's a very nice idea—and a natural one. Once on a time, ladies could get those that were almost gentlefolks themselves, to be their maids. It is not so now. They mustn't be called by that name But many a young lady would be glad to come and live with you, and do some of the little things that maids were fit for once."

"I have Mackay—and I have you, Charity," said Mrs. Raven, "but I feel very lonely, and my sons must be away from me, and so I have advertised for a lady companion. The letters that went off this morning contained the advertisement."

"Now, was I not clever?" cried Charity in a sort of eldritch glee. "I could not help fancying it was something of that sort the minute I saw those letters."

Mrs. Raven's heart beat heavily. She was now standing before a small set of toilet drawers, which held private matters, and went on examining them. Unfolding a roll of richly brocaded, cherry-coloured ribbon, she observed that it might be dyed: the colour was a little

faded, and therefore it would be useless to put it away, and it would take black beautifully.

"I don't know," said Charity, "the fading would not show if it were twisted up into the bows and fal-lals young damsels wear on their gowns now-a-days. The new young lady that's coming might be rare glad of it, madam."

"A companion is not a maid to receive worn garments, Charity," answered Mrs. Raven, bending over her ribbons and speaking very quietly, but with a red spot burning strangely in her cheeks.

"No, no, madam; don't think I misunderstand," returned the old woman. "But a lady like you might give her some of your own things, as you might to a daughter of your own."

"I've often wished I had a daughter, Charity," said Mrs. Raven. "Though if we are wise, we should wish for nothing that does not exist."

"Ah, true, madam. But who is always wise? And sometimes, when we get what we wish, we wish back what we had before. But changes must come, anyway. It is in the course of nature."

"The less change the better!" retorted Mrs. Raven, with a sudden energy. Her soul was crying out for some lonely hermitage in some vast wilderness, where nothing could mark the passing of the days but the rising and setting of the sun; so that she might have possible rest from the doubts and suspicions and fears which haunted her like a host of invisible and tormenting demons.

"I think so too, madam: the less change the better. But the new Squire doesn't."

"Some changes must be for the better, of course, Charity."

"Aye," returned the woman, "and of course all is for the best, and will turn out right. But there's risks in most things."

Mrs. Raven did not look up. She knew those small sharp eyes were on her, and she felt cold from head to foot.

"I'm fearing to myself that the Squire may be thinking me an encumbrance next," said Charity. "I hope he will speak if he does. I should not like to stay to be a burden. I have long thought of a day when I might be told to go—and I've provided for it," she added, in a low whisper; which had nothing of bravado or insolence in it, but which, somehow, Mrs. Raven shuddered at.

"My son will not interfere with the household servants while I am here. Note you that, Charity."

"Ah, no, perhaps not, ma'am. But poor people have their feelings like rich ones, and if one's place is turned inside out, one might as well be turned outside oneself. I am not quite myself, maybe, this morning," she added, "for I have been hearing something I don't like: and we get frightened easily when we are old."

"What is it that you have been hearing?"

"There is a strangely queer woman staying at the Pitchfork. James went there on an errand, and he brought back the news. She pro-

fesses to see the past, and to foretell the future—and she declares that there is evil in the air at Ravenstoke."

Mrs. Raven had looked round in surprise. "Why, who is she?—What can she be doing at the Pitchfork?"

"That's what I should like to know," said Charity. "She talks of ghosts, too. She told the people there that the figure of a tall man, with a red mark on his neck, walks at night along the Warren Road, and looks back to shake his fist at the Court here. I am glad Mr. Frank is away, madam: though I dare be bound he'd only laugh at it, and call it rubbish. I knew a lady who could never bear to hear the wind in the ivy when her husband was away from home. The meaning of things is in the ear that hears them."

Mrs. Raven sat down in the chair that was drawn up close behind her, a whole world of thought revolving in her brain. A curious dread of this strange woman had seized upon her mind. What did she know?—for what purpose had she come to Ravenstoke? Charity saw her mistress's perplexity.

"Don't you take it to heart, madam," she cried. "I'd not have told you, but that I thought you'd be above caring for it. But it's little wonder you are nervous just now, with the trouble there's been in the house."

"I'm not taking it to heart, Charity: what do you mean? But I am vexed. These people ought not to be allowed to say such things. They are wicked and cruel."

"No, they ought not," assented Charity, quite readily. "For a ghost is seldom a credit to a gentleman's house, though it may be interesting to strangers round about it. Dear, dear, how the dust is getting into these little drawers!" broke off Charity, in a different tone, peeping into the contents of a Duchesse toilet-table.

"We must spread paper on the top of them: they won't be opened again for a long while," said Mrs. Raven, wearily.

"They will have to be very small sheets of paper," remarked Charity; "and they always get caught in the backs of the drawers."

"Go downstairs and get some of my thick note-paper with the coloured monogram on it," directed her mistress, after a moment's thought. "It is so thick that it will stay as we put it. You will find it in the bottom drawer of the cabinet in the back drawing-room."

Charity obeyed. She was not gone three minutes; for though she was a little lame, and at times walked heavily, she was often wonderfully active for a woman of her years. She handed the packet to Mrs. Raven.

"Is that right, madam? I found it where you told me."

And then they busied themselves with the shaking out, assorting, and refolding of the delicate laces, Charity passing them on to her mistress, who packed them away and covered them up with her own hands.

"I hope none of our servants have been to see this fortune-teller,"

exclaimed Mrs. Raven, as if the thought had struck her. "Or that they will go. It is wrong to countenance such people. They are often thieves, or worse."

"I'd not answer for what the servants may do, madam. They are but simple ones."

"The Squire will be annoyed if he hears of this. Especially if those foolish stories, about the figure appearing again in the Warren Walk, gain currency."

"And that they will be sure to do," asserted Charity in a positive tone. "The girls will be going out to look for it now, I shouldn't wonder."

"This gipsy woman ought to be warned that Mr. Raven will not tolerate such characters on his land. Not publicly; privately. Any publicity might do more harm than good—and cause a scandal in the place. Could you carry a message to her, Charity?"

"I'd rather not, ma'am," answered Charity, shrinking back. "The others would never believe but what I was consulting her for myself."

Mrs. Raven hesitated. She feared this woman. Charity Hale lay at the bottom of all the surmises and terrors. But even fear makes a sort of tie. And if all that she dreaded and suspected were true, she scarcely knew whether to regard Charity as a secret ally or an open foe.

"I think it would be best for everybody if she were to be told what would befall her at the Squire's hands, and advised to go quietly away at once," observed Mrs. Raven. "I think I will go to her myself: perhaps this evening. It is, in a way, my duty."

"I should say, ma'am, that will be best—for everybody," answered Charity.

The drawers were arranged by this time. Charity discharged a few more little duties about her mistress's room, and then went away. Nobody saw her again till the servants' dinner hour. Charity usually did her darnings and mendings in her own apartment, holding rather aloof from the comings and goings and general sociability of the servants' hall.

Mrs. Raven did not leave the house all day. When her son was from home she generally took an early dinner, and went out for a stroll after afternoon tea. To-day was to be no exception to this ordinary rule. Mrs. Sims, chatting with the gardener about vegetable prospects, saw the lady walk out for her evening ramble. She was not a woman who stopped to speak with her servants, and a lowering of her thin blue-veined eyelids was her sole recognition of their courtesy and salute.

On she went, past her own lodge, out into the high road, between its green hedges where the leaves were already drooping. Village matrons peeped at her as she passed, and commented on the length of her widow's veil and the paleness of her face. She passed the Vicarage, half wondering to herself whether it might not have been wise to enlist the Reverend Jasper Toynbee in her crusade for the

sake of his ignorant and superstitious flock, and send him to deliver the message she was carrying. Near the church workmen were lingering. There was a sort of shy pathos in their faces as they touched their hats to her—for they were employed on her dead husband's monument.

The Pitchfork was a very homely hostelry, standing behind a row of polled trees on the edge of Raven Green. Its hostess kept cows, and thought a great deal more of them than of her bar. It was but a mild sort of dissipation that went on inside the Pitchfork, or on the heavy seat outside its door; nevertheless, it was much and justly dreaded by village matrons, and had been steadily discountenanced by the late Squire and the Vicar. Therefore the hearts of both Mr. and Mrs. Worsfold failed them when they saw Mrs. Raven making straight for their porch.

"Good evening," she said, coldly; and waited while they respectfully returned the salutation. "I am given to understand you have taken in a lodger who is a kind of fortune-teller. My servants are speaking of her already. You should discourage the presence of such a person on your premises, Worsfold; my son, as you may know, would not like it. I hope you will send her away before the matter reaches his ears."

"She doesn't profess to tell fortunes," said Worsfold in eager apology. "It was only some of my missis's nonsense, wanting to hear things as is better hid. I'll do anything you think right, ma'am: it stands to reason we should consider the Squire's pleasure first of all. But it'll seem queer-like to have to tell the creature to go for doing what we asked her to do."

"There is no need to trouble yourself, good man," interposed the clear hard voice of somebody who was descending the stairs. "The 'creature' is already going: and she is now about to pay you."

With the last words the stranger stood before Mrs. Raven. She was a tall woman, with a fine, strongly-featured face, covered with minute wrinkles, which gave her an appearance of old age inconsistent with her upright figure and vigorous spirit. She was handsomely dressed, without any sign of gaudiness or tawdriness, and yet her garments, like herself, lacked the something which stamps the lady, or even the well-bred, respectable woman. There was a snapping flash in her black eyes; her full lips were straight and tightly drawn; and she carried a small handbag, all the luggage she had brought to the Pitchfork.

Advancing to the counter, she threw down a sovereign and asked for change, which Mrs. Worsfold tremblingly counted out. She entirely ignored Mrs. Raven's existence, though that lady felt that the woman was thoroughly alive to her presence. What strong, masculine hands she had, white and soft, as though with idleness! Mrs. Raven shrank from her in a dread not definable. She shuddered to remember that it was a hidden interest—a personal fear—which had drawn her here, into some sort of relation with this woman.

"Pay yourself well, hostess," said the parting guest, in her deep, harsh tones. "I don't grudge giving you another bit of wisdom before I go," she added as she took the change, "and I'll set it up in rhyme, to pin it into your memory. Listen: it's something so good, that you might repeat it to your vicar :—

"They who wish a thought of ill
Find it easy to fulfil ;
When they wish to crush its fruit,
Lo, the several seeds take root ;
When with others' sins they twine,
Who need question, 'Mine or thine.'"

Mrs. Raven turned and stepped from the porch before the verse was complete. The Worsfolds felt that she was mortally affronted, and did not wonder at it, seeing the mingling of cool impudence and angry defiance in the woman's manner. She dropped the change into her bag, wished the host and hostess farewell, and strode away in turn. They stood in the porch and watched.

The strange woman overtook Mrs. Raven at the pond, just beyond the polled trees. She passed her, then turned round and stood still, straight in the lady's path.

Mrs. Raven also stood quite still : there was nothing else to do. To attempt to fly would be useless. By a strong effort of will she commanded all her dignity ; all that hereditary consciousness of importance and power which had never failed her till within the last few days. Looking at her adversary, she met the cold black eyes gleaming, not like fires, but like knives—met them resolutely. She felt on the edge of the worst—of a worst which she could not fathom—and she rallied in desperation to confront it.

The two women stood so, facing each other for a full minute. Mrs. Raven began to be aware of a horrible sensation of inability to withdraw her gaze. The handsome, repulsive face seemed magically to change beneath it. Elusive memories peeped through it, mocked and vanished. Was her brain giving way ? The woman broke into a low metallic laugh.

"Go home, Mrs. Raven," she said ; "I have nothing to say to you. Go home, and look in the second drawer of your small toilet set. Take out the covering paper, the top paper, mind, and hold it over your candle—and take warning."

She passed swiftly to the cross roads, and was lost to sight. Mrs. Raven, gazing after her in consternation, pulled her senses together with a shiver. Stumbling along half blindly, she remembered that the last train had left Ravenstoke : where was the woman going ?

Worsfold and his wife recollected that, too. But he suggested that "she was one of the sort that could manage fine with a broomstick and the moon."

*(To be continued.)*

## MONKSHOOD.

ALTHOUGH the natural history of plants is no longer confined to those who make the art of simpling their business, but has become a necessary branch of education, it is extraordinary how little people in general know about the flowers they love. It would surprise, and certainly (to use his own familiar expression) would *terrify* the cottager, to be told that the chief ornament of his little plot of garden, his tall, handsome, highly respectable-looking Monkshood is no other than the baleful Aconite, whose name is derived from a Greek word signifying *without a struggle*, and which the early writers say kills man, unless it can find in man something else to kill. Dr. Turner, the father of English botany, calls it "of all poysones the most hastie poysone;" and old Culpepper mentions it in his "British Herbal," simply as a poison, for which he recommends mulberry leaves as an antidote.

Three centuries ago the nature of aconite was accurately understood; and in much earlier days Pliny remarked that it exercises the same effect upon the body that the whetstone does upon the wedge of iron, being no sooner employed than its effects are felt.

Its use and dangers were well known to the ancients, and according to the fables of mythology, it was originally produced from the foam of the dog Cerberus, when dragged by Hercules from the infernal regions—for which reason it is still so remarkably abundant in the vicinity of Heraclea, in Pontus, a spot where is still pointed out the entrance to the shades below.

It is supposed to have been the principal ingredient in the poisonous cup mixed by Medea for Theseus. It was the poison employed in the island of Æos, to execute the barbarous law which condemned to death all who were no longer useful to the state, or were too feeble to defend themselves; whilst, if we descend to modern times, it will be remembered by those interested in the annals of crime, that tincture of aconite was the agent employed by Dr. Pritchard for the murder of his wife and mother-in-law, at Glasgow, in 1865.

In our own days poisoning by the root of aconite is unfortunately by no means infrequent. It has been eaten on several occasions in mistake for horse-radish, and death has usually ensued. All parts of the plant are poisonous, but the root is especially noxious, and when the leaves have fallen it appears to possess its greatest virulence. On chewing a very small portion of either the root or leaves, a sensation of numbness will, after a few minutes, be experienced in the lips and tongue, and will continue for some hours.

The symptoms produced by aconite poisoning are very striking

and sudden : burning and numbness of the lips, mouth, and throat —tremor, pain, and coldness of the limbs. The pulse becomes more and more irregular, and death soon puts an end to the patient's sufferings. The remedies (of which warmth and stimulants are the chief) are to be found in a very useful book just published, which should be ready on the table, or, better still, in the pocket of every medical man.*

Monkshood is only an introduced plant into Britain. It is a native of the Alpine forests of France, Switzerland, and Italy, but it may be found wild in some shady places in Western England and South Wales : it is called in Scotland the castaway of the garden.

Fragments of the root-stock will grow when accidentally thrown into waste places ; and Pliny thinks it derives its name from the circumstance of its growing on the naked rocks known as Aconæ, where there is not so much as dust about it to conduce to its nutriment. The root is perennial, tapering, or spindle-shaped. The flowering stems rise early in the spring, and every vigorous stem terminates in a large, erect, and handsome raceme of violet-purple flowers, irregular in form. The hood is really one of the sepals transformed, and with the nectaries is characteristic of the genus.

Phillips, in his "Vegetable Kingdom," a mine of wealth to the botanist as well as the student of materia medica, describes that even the odour thrown out, when the plant is in full bloom, acts injuriously upon susceptible constitutions, and sometimes causes loss of sight for a day or two. In other instances it has been known to induce fainting fits.

It is found in Sweden, Siberia, and Western Asia, as far as the Himalayas, and is much prescribed in every part of India, though it is said that the druggists, calculating on the ignorance of both practitioners and patients respecting the true drug, generally substitute some which they consider an equivalent. The celebrated Indian poison, emphatically called *Bish*, *the poison*, is the root of aconite ferox, which is brought down to the plains of India from the mountains where the plant is indigenous. In all native works, the Bish is represented as being a deadly poison, even in the smallest doses. It is described as being first sweetish, and then followed by a roughness on the tongue, or, as it is expressed in one Hindoo work, *seizing the throat.* It is regarded as equally fatal when taken internally and when applied to wounds : hence its use for poisoning arrows and killing wild animals. So frequent at one time was its employment as a poison, that its sale was prohibited in India, notwithstanding which, the Hindo physicians, noted for the use of powerful drugs, do not hesitate to employ it.

Few remedies are of much more general utility in our own nineteenth century practice. In inflammatory fevers it not only abates the

* "What to Do in Cases of Poisoning." By William Murrell, M.D., M.R.C.P.

frequency of the heart's action, but quickly reduces the temperature. It is valuable in erysipelas, in muscular rheumatism, in gout, in quinsy, in every kind of bad sore throat: but it must be given in the early stage of inflammation, when its power is almost marvellous, and it must always be given alone. It is especially serviceable in that chilliness, aching of the limbs, hot dry skin, and quick pulse which distinguish one of the most trying of troubles, "*a bad cold all over.*"

The formidable poison has been reduced to so manageable a condition that those who have experienced its beneficent properties will gratefully echo the poet's comfortable reflection—

E'en the terror poison
Hath its plea for blooming:
Life it gives to reverend lips, tho' death to the presuming.

C. E. MEETKERKE.

## SPRING.

By a thousand subtle signs,
Fading cloud and brightening blue,
By the beauty earth enshrines,
Leaf and grass, and—peeping through—
Flowers of dainty fashioning,
Hither comes the laughing Spring.

Now the birds begin their trill,
New-found joy in every note;
Now the nodding daffodil
Proudly dons his yellow coat,
Like a gallant courtier,
Bending low for love of her.

Slender vine and rugged tree
Smile beneath the touch of Spring;
Through the ice-bound Northern Sea
Runs a thrill of wakening;
And the world is all astir,
Jubilant for love of her.

Banish fear and vain regrets,
Else will life be little worth;
With the fragrant violets
Rouse thee, Hope and harmless Mirth;
All the bliss the year can bring
Hither follow laughing Spring.

SYDNEY GREY.

## A MYSTERY.

I SCARCELY know how to go on with this story so as to put its complications and discrepancies of evidence clearly before you. William Brook had been daily expected to land at Liverpool from the West Indies, and to make his way at once to Timberdale by rail, viâ Birmingham and Worcester.

In the afternoon of the 19th of October, Mrs. James Ashton chanced to be at the Worcester station when the Birmingham train came in. Amidst the passengers who alighted from it she saw William Brook, whom she had known all her life. She was not near enough to speak to him, but she watched him cross the line to the opposite platform, shake hands there with Mr. St. George, and remain talking. Subsequently, Gregory West had met St. George leaving Worcester in his gig, a gentleman sitting with him; it was therefore assumed without doubt that he was driving William Brook to Timberdale, to save him the railway journey and for companionship.

That same evening, at dusk, as we (not knowing that Brook had landed) were returning home from Pigeon Green in the large phaeton, amid a great storm of wind, and slight sleet and snow, Mrs. Todhetley sitting with the Squire in front, Tod and I behind, we passed St. George's gig in Dip Lane; and saw William Brook with him—as we believed, Tod most positively. We called out to Brook, waving our hats; Brook called back to us and waved his.

But now, Mr. St. George denied that it was Brook. He said the gentleman with him was a stranger to whom he had given a lift of three or four miles on the road, and who bore no resemblance to Brook, so far as he saw. Was it Brook, or was it not? asked everybody. If it was Brook, what had become of him? The only one point that seemed to be sure in the matter was this—William Brook had not reached Timberdale.

The following, elaborated, was Mr. St. George's statement.

He, as confidential clerk, soon to be partner, of Mr. Delorane, had a good deal of business to go through that day with Philip West at Worcester, and the afternoon was well on before it was concluded. He then went up to the station at Shrub Hill to inquire after a missing packet of deeds, which had been despatched by rail from Birmingham to Mr. Delorane and as yet could not be heard of. His inquiries over, St. George was traversing the platform on his way to quit the station, when one of the passengers, who had then crossed the line from the Birmingham train, stopped him to ask if he could inform him when the next train would leave for Evesham. "Very shortly," St. George replied, speaking from memory: but even as he spoke a doubt arose in his mind. "Wait a moment," he said to the stranger;

"I am not sure that I am correct"—and he drew from his pocket a time-table and consulted it. There would not be a train for Evesham for more than two hours, he found, one having just gone. The stranger remarked that it was very unfortunate; he had not wanted to wait all that time at Worcester, but to get on at once. The stranger then detained him to ask, apologising for the trouble, and adding that it was the first time he had been in the locality, whether he could get on from Evesham to Cheltenham. St. George told him that he could, but that he could also get on to Cheltenham from Worcester direct. "Ah," remarked the stranger, "but I have to take Evesham on my way." No more passed, and St. George left him on the platform. He appeared to be a gentleman, spoke as a cultured man speaks, St. George added when questioned on these points: and his appearance and attire tallied with that given by Mrs. Ashton. St. George had not observed Mrs. James Ashton on the opposite platform; did not know she was there.

Perceiving, as he left the station, how bad the weather was getting, and what a wild night might be expected, St. George rapidly made up his mind to start for home at once, without waiting for tea at Philip West's or going back at all to the house. He made his way to the Hare-and-Hounds through the back streets, as being the nearest, ordered his gig, and set off—alone—as soon as it was ready. It was then getting dusk; snow was falling in scanty flakes mixed with sleet, and the wind was roaring and rushing like mad.

Gaining the top of Red Hill, St. George was bowling along the level road beyond it, when some wayfarer turned round just before him, put up his hand, and spoke. By the peculiar-coloured coat—a sort of slate—and white comforter, he recognised the stranger of the railway station; he also remembered the voice. "I beg your pardon a thousand times for stopping you," he said, "but I think I perceive that the road branches off two ways yonder: will you kindly tell me which of them will take me to Evesham: there seems to be nobody about on foot that I can inquire of." "That will be your way," St. George answered, pointing with his whip. "But you are not thinking of walking to Evesham to-night, are you!" he added. "It is fifteen miles off."

The stranger replied that he had made up his mind to walk, rather than wait two hours at Worcester station: and St. George was touching his horse to move on, when a thought struck him.

"I am not going the direct Evesham road, but I can give you a lift part of the way," he said. "It will not cut off any of the distance for you, but it will save your legs three or four miles." The stranger thanked him and got up at once, St. George undoing the apron to admit him. He had the same black bag with him that St. George had noticed at the station.

St. George had thus to make a detour to accommodate the stranger. He was by no means unwilling to do it; for, apart from the wish to

help a fellow creature, he believed it would be less rough in the low lying lands. Driving along in the teeth of the furious wind, he turned off the highway and got into Dip Lane.—We saw him in it, the stranger sitting with him.—He drove on after we had passed, pulled up at the proper place for the man to descend, and pointed out the route. "You have got a mile or two of these byways," he said to him, "but keep straight on and they will bring you out into the open road. Turn to your left then, and you will gain Evesham in time—and I wish you well through your walk."

Those were St. George's exact words—as he repeated to us later. The stranger thanked him heartily, shook hands and went on his way, carrying his black bag. St. George said that before parting with the traveller, he suggested that he should go on with him to Timberdale, seeing the night was so cold and wild, put up at the Plough-and-Harrow, where he could get a comfortable bed, and go on to Evesham n the morning. But the stranger declined, and seemed impatient to get on.

He did not tell St. George who he was, or what he was; he did not tell his name, or what his business was in Worcestershire, or whether he was purposing to make a stay at Evesham, or whither he might be going when he left it: unless the question he had put to St. George, as to being able to get on to Cheltenham, might be taken for an indication of his route. In fact, he stated nothing whatever about himself; but, as St. George said, the state of the weather was against talking. It was difficult to hear each other speak; the blasts howled about their ears perpetually, and the sharp sleet stung their faces. As to his bearing the resemblance to Brook that was being talked of, St. George could only repeat that he did not perceive it; he might have been about Brook's height and size, but that was all. The voice was certainly not Brook's, not in the least like Brook's, neither was the face, so far as St. George saw of it: no idea of the kind struck him.

These were the different statements: and, reading them, you have the matter in a nutshell. Mrs. James Ashton continued to affirm that it was William Brook she saw at the station, and could not be shaken out of her belief. She and William had played together as children, they had flirted together, she was pleased to declare, as youth and maiden, and *did* anybody suppose she could mistake an unknown young man for him in broad daylight? An immense favourite with all the world, Marianne Ashton was fond of holding decisively to her own opinions; all her words might have begun with capital letters.

I also maintained that the young man we saw in St. George's gig in Dip Lane, and who wore a warm great coat of rather an unusual colour, something of a grey—or a slate—or a mouse, with the white woollen comforter on his neck and the soft low-crowned hat drawn well on his brows, was William Brook. When he took off his hat

to wave it to us in response, I saw (as I fully believed) that it was Brook; and I noticed his gloves. Mrs. Todhetley, who had turned her head at our words, also saw him and felt not the slightest doubt that it was he. Tod was ready to swear to it.

To combat this, we had Mr. St. George's cool, calm, decisive assertion that the man was a stranger. Of course it outweighed ours. All the probabilities lay with it; he had been in companionship with the stranger, had talked with him face to face: we had not. Besides, if it had been Brook, where was he that he had not made his way to Timberdale? So we took up the common-sense view of the matter and dismissed our own impressions as fancies that would not hold water, and looked out daily for the landing of the exile. Aunt Hester hoped he was not "lost at sea:" but she did not say it in the hearing of Ellin Delorane.

The days went on. November came in. William Brook did not appear to land; no tidings reached us of him. His continued non-appearance so effectually confirmed St. George's statement, that the other idea was exploded and forgotten by all reasonable minds. Possibly in one or two unreasonable ones, such as mine, say, a sort of hazy doubt might still hover. But, doubt of what? Ay, that was the question. Even Tod veered round to the enemy, said his sight must have misled him, and laid the blame on the wind. Both common sense and uncommon said Brook had but been detained in Jamaica, and might be expected in any day.

The first check to this security of expectation was wrought by a letter. A letter from New York, addressed to William Brook by his brother there, Charles. Mrs. Brook opened it. She was growing vaguely uneasy, and had already begun to ask herself why, were William detained in the West Indies, he did not write to tell her so.

And this, as it proved, was the chief question the letter was written to ask. "If," wrote Charles Brook to his brother, "if you have arrived at home—as we conclude you must have done, having seen in the papers the safe arrival of the Dart at Liverpool—how is it you have not written to say so, and to inform us how things are progressing. The uncle does not like it. 'Is William getting negligent?' he said to me yesterday."

The phrase "how things are progressing," Mrs. Brook understood to apply to the new mercantile house about to be established in London. She sent the letter by Araminta to Mr. Delorane.

"Can William have been drowned at sea!" breathed Minty.

"No, no; I don't fear that; I'm not like that silly woman, Aunt Hester, with her dreams and her fancies," said Mr. Delorane. "It seems odd, though, where he can be."

Inquiries were made at Liverpool for the list of passengers by the Dart. William Brook's name was not amidst them. Timberdale waited on. There was nothing else for it to do. Waited until a

second letter came from Charles Brook. It was written to his mother this time. He asked for news of William; whether he had, or had not, arrived at home.

The next West Indian mail packet, steaming from Southampton, carried out a letter from Mr. St. George, written to his cousin in Kingston, Jamaica, at the desire of Mr. Delorane: at the desire, it may with truth be said, of Timberdale in general. The same mail also took out a letter from Reginald Brook in London, who had been made acquainted with the trouble. Both letters were to the same purport—an inquiry as to William Brook and his movements, more particularly as to the time he had departed for home, and the vessel he had sailed in.

In six or eight weeks, which seemed to some of us like so many months, Mr. St. George got an answer. His relative, Leonard St. George, sent rather a curious story. He did not know anything of William Brook's movements himself, he wrote, and could not gain much reliable information about them. It appeared that he was to have sailed for England in the Dart, a steamer bound for Liverpool, not one of their regular passenger packets. He was unable, however, to find any record that Brook had gone in her, and believed he had not: neither could he learn that Brook had departed by any other vessel. A friend of his told him that he feared Brook was dead. The day before the Dart went out of port, a young man, who bore out in every respect the description of Brook, was drowned in the harbour.

Comforting news! Delightfully comforting for Ellin Delorane, not to speak of Brook's people. Aunt Hester came over to Crabb Cot, and burst into tears as she told it.

But the next morning brought a turn in the tide; one less sombre, though uncertain still. Mrs. Brook, who had bedewed her pillow with salt tears, for her youngest son was very dear to her heart, received a letter from her son Reginald in London, enclosing one he had just got from the West Indies. She brought them to Mr. Delorane's office during the morning, and the Squire and I happened to be there.

"How should Reginald know anything about it?" demanded St. George, in the haughty manner he could put on when not pleased; and his countenance looked dark as he gazed across his desk at Mrs. Brook, for which I saw no occasion. Evidently he did not like to have his brother's news disputed.

"Reginald wrote to Kingston by the same mail that you wrote," she said. "He got an introduction to some mercantile firm out there, and this is their answer to him."

They stated, these merchants, that they had made due inquiries according to request, and found that William Brook had secured a passage on board the Dart; but that, finding himself unable to go in her, his business in Kingston not being finished, he had, at the

last moment, made over his berth and ticket to another gentleman, who found himself called upon to sail unexpectedly: and that he, Brook, had departed by the Idalia, which left two days later than the Dart and was also bound for Liverpool.

"I have ascertained here, dear mother," wrote Reginald from London, "that the Idalia made a good passage and reached Liverpool on the 18th of October. If the statement which I enclose you be correct, that William left Jamaica in her, he must have arrived in her at Liverpool, unless he died by the way. It is very strange where he can be, and what can have become of him. Of course, inquiries must now be made in Liverpool. I only wish I could go down myself, but our patients are all on my hands just now, for Dr. Croft is ill."

The first thought, flashing into the mind of Mr. Delorane, was, that the 18th of October was the eve of the day on which William Brook was said to have been seen by Mrs. James Ashton. He paused to consider, a sort of puzzled doubt on his face.

"Why, look you here," cried he quickly, "it seems as though that *was* Brook at Worcester station. If he reached Liverpool on the 18th, the probabilities are that he would be at Worcester on the 19th. What do you make of it?"

We could not make anything. Mrs. Brook looked pale and distressed. The Squire, in his impulsive good-nature, offered to be the one to go, off-hand, to make the inquiries at Liverpool. St. George opposed this: *he* was the proper person to go, he said; but Mrs. Delorane reminded him that he could be ill-spared just then when the assizes were at hand. For the time had gone on to spring.

"I will start to-night," said the Squire, "and take Johnny with me. My time is my own. We will turn Liverpool upside down but what we find Brook—if he is to be found on earth."

That the Squire might have turned Liverpool "upside down" with the confusion of his inquiries was likely enough, only that Jack Tanerton was there, having brought his own good ship, the Rose of Delhi, into port but a few days before. Jack and William Brook had been boys together, and Jack took up the cause in warm-hearted zeal. His knowledge of the town and its shipping made our way plain before us. That is, as plain as a way can be made which seems to have neither inlet nor outlet.

The Idalia was then lying in the Liverpool docks, not long in again from the West Indies. We ascertained that William Brook had come in her the previous autumn, making the port of Liverpool on the 18th of October.

"Then nothing happened to him half-way?" cried the Squire to the second mate, a decent sort of fellow who did all he could for us. "He was not lost, or—or—anything of that?"

"Why no," said the mate, looking surprised. "He was all right

the whole of the voyage and in first-rate spirits—a very nice young fellow altogether. The Idalia brought him home, all taut and safe, take our word for that, sir; and he went ashore with the rest, and his luggage also: of which he had but little; just a big case and the small one that was in his cabin."

All this was certain. But from the hour Brook stepped ashore, we were unable to trace anything certain about him. The hotels could not single him out in memory from other temporary sojourners. I think it was by no means a usual occurrence in those days for passing guests to give in their names. Anyway, we found no record of Brook's. The railway porters remembered no more of him than the hotels—and it was hardly likely they would.

Captain Tanerton—to give Jack his title—was indefatigable; winding himself in and out of all kinds of places like a detective eel. In some marvellous way he got to learn that a gentleman whose appearance tallied with Brook's had bought some tan-coloured kid gloves and also a white comforter in a shop in Bold Street on the morning of the 19th of October. Jack took us there that we might question the people, especially the young woman who served him. She said that, while choosing the gloves, he observed that he had just come off a sea voyage and found the weather here very chilly. He wore a lightish great-coat, a sort of slate or grey. She was setting out the window when he came in, and had to leave it to serve him; it was barely eight o'clock, and she remarked to him that he was shopping betimes; he replied yes, for he was going off directly by train. He bought two pair of the gloves, putting one pair of them on in the shop; he next bought a warm knitted woollen scarf, white, and put on that. She was quite certain it was the 19th of October, and told us why she could not be mistaken. And that was the last trace we could get of Brook in Liverpool.

Well, well; it is of no use to linger. We went away from Liverpool, the Squire and I, no better off than we were when we entered it. That William Brook had arrived safely by the Idalia, and that he had landed safely, appeared to be a fact indisputable: but after that time he seemed to have vanished into air. Unless, mark you, it was he who had come on to Worcester.

The most concerned of all at our ill-luck was Mr. St. George. He had treated the matter lightly when thinking Brook was but lingering over the seas; now that it was proved he returned by the Idalia, the case was different.

"I don't like it at all," he said to the Squire frankly. "People may begin to think it was really Brook I had with me that night, and ask me what I did with him."

"What could you have done with him?" dissented the Squire.

"Not much—that I see. I couldn't pack him up in a parcel to be sent back over seas, and I couldn't bury him here. I wish with all my heart it had been Brook! I'll not leave a stone unturned

now but what I find him," added St. George, his eyes flashing, his face flushing hotly. "Anyway, I'll find the man who was with me."

St. George set to work. Making inquiries here, there and everywhere for William Brook, personally and by advertising. But little came of it. A porter at the Worcester railway station, who had seen the traveller talking with St. George on the platform, came forward to state that they (the gentleman and Mr. St. George) had left the station together, walking away from it side by side, down the road. St. George utterly denied this. He admitted that the other might have followed him so closely as to impart a possible appearance of their being together, but if so, he was not conscious of it. Just as he had denied shaking hands with the stranger, which Mrs. James Ashton insisted upon.

Next a lady came forward. She had travelled from Birmingham that afternoon, the 19th of October, with her little nephew and niece. In the same compartmemt, a first-class one, was another passenger, bearing, both in attire and person, the description told of—a very pleasant, gentlemanly young man, nice-looking, eyes dark blue. It was bitterly cold: he seemed to feel it greatly, and said he had recently come from a warmer climate. He also said that he ought to have got into Worcester by an earlier train, but had been detained in Birmingham, through missing his luggage, which he supposed must have been put out by mistake at some intermediate station. He had with him a small black hand-bag; nothing else that she saw. His great-coat was of a peculiar shade of grey; it did not look like an English-made coat; his well-fitting kid gloves were of fawn (or tan) colour, and appeared to be new. Once, when the high wind seemed to shake the carriage, he remarked with a smile that one might almost as well be at sea; upon which her little nephew said: "Have you ever been to sea, sir?" "Yes, my little lad," he answered; "I landed from it only yesterday."

The only other person to come forward was a farmer named Lockett, well known to us all. He lived on the Evesham road, close upon the turning, or byway, which led up from Dip Lane. On the night of the storm, the 19th of October, he went out about ten o'clock to visit a neighbour, who had met with a bad accident. In passing by this turning, a man came out of it, walking pretty sharply. He looked like a gentleman, seemed to be muffled up round the neck, and carried something in his hand; whether a black bag, or not, Mr. Lockett did not observe. "A wild night," said the farmer to him in salutation. "It is that," answered the other. He took the road to Evesham, and Mr. Lockett saw him no more.

St. George was delighted at this evidence. He could have hugged old Lockett. "I knew that the truth would be corroborated sooner or later," he said, his eyes sparkling. "That was the man I put out of my gig in Dip Lane."

"Stop a bit," cried Mr. Delorane, a doubt striking him. "If it

was the same man, what had he been doing to take two or three hours to get into the Evesham road? Did he bear any resemblance to William Brook, Lockett?—you would have known Brook."

"None at all that I saw. As to knowing Brook, or anybody else, I can't answer for it on such a night as that," added the farmer after a pause. "Brook would have known me, though, I take it, daylight or dark, seeing me close to my own place, and all."

"It was the other man," affirmed St. George exultantly, "and now we will find him."

An advertisement was next inserted in the local newspapers by Mr. St. George, and also in the *Times*.

"Gentleman Wanted. The traveller who got out of the Birmingham train at Worcester railway station on the 19th of last October, towards the close of the afternoon, and who spoke to a gentleman on the platform respecting the trains to Evesham and to Cheltenham, and who was subsequently overtaken a little way out of Worcester by the same gentleman and given a few miles' lift in his gig, and was put down in a cross-country lane to continue his walk to Evesham: this traveller is earnestly requested to give an address where he may be communicated with, to Alfred St. George, Esquire, Timberdale, Worcester. By doing so, he will be conferring a great favour."

For two long weeks the advertisements brought forth no reply. At the end of that time there came to Mr. St. George a post-letter, short and sweet.

"Tell me what I am wanted for.—R. W."

It was dated Post Office, Cheltenham. To the Post Office, Cheltenham, St. George, consulting with Mr. Delorane, wrote a brief explanation. That he (R. W.) had been mistaken by some people who saw him that night in the gig, for a gentleman named Brook, a native of Timberdale, who had been missing since about that time. This, as R. W. might perceive, was not pleasant for himself, St. George; and he begged R. W. to come forward and set the erroneous idea at rest, or to state where he could be seen. Expenses, if any, would be cheerfully paid.

This letter brought forth the following answer:—

"Dear Sir,—I regret that your courtesy to me that stormy night should have led to misapprehension. I the more regret it that I am not able to comply with your request to come forward. At present that is impossible. The truth is, I am, and have been for some months now, lying under a cloud, partly through my own credulous fault, chiefly through the designing faults of another man, and I dare not show myself. It may be many more months yet before I am cleared: that I shall be, in time, there exists no doubt of, and I shall then gladly bear personal testimony to the fact that it was I myself who was with you. Meanwhile, perhaps the following statement will suffice: which I declare upon my honour to be true.

"I was hiding at Crewe, when I got a letter from a friend at Eve-

sham, bidding me to go to him without delay. I had no scruple in complying, not being known at all in Worcestershire, and I started by one of the Liverpool trains. I had a portmanteau with me containing papers principally, and this I missed on arriving at Birmingham. The looking for it caused me to lose the Worcester train, but I went on by the next. Upon getting out there, I addressed the first person I saw after crossing the line—yourself. I inquired of you when the next train would start for Evesham. Not for two hours, you told me: so I set off to walk, after getting some light refreshment. Barely had I left Worcester when, through the evening's dusk, I thought I saw that the road before me branched off two ways. I did not know which to take, and ventured to stop a gig, then bowling up behind me, to ask. As you answered me I recognised you for the gentleman to whom I had spoken at the station. You offered to take me a few miles on my road, and I got into the gig. I found that you would have to go out of your way to do this, and I expressed concern; you laughed my apologies off, saying you should probably have chosen the way in any case, as it was more sheltered. You drove me as far as your road lay, told me that after I got out of the cross lanes my way would be a straight one, and I left you with hearty thanks—which I repeat now. I may as well tell you that I got to Evesham without mishap—in process of time. The storm was so bad, the wind so fierce, that I was fain to turn out of the lane close upon leaving you, and shelter myself for an hour or two under a hay-rick, hoping it would abate. How it was possible for mortal man to see enough of me that night in your gig to mistake me for somebody else, I am at a loss to understand. I remember that carriage passing us in the narrow lane, the people in it shouted out to you: it must have been they, I conclude, who mistook me, for I do not think we saw another soul. You are at full liberty to show them this letter: but I must ask you not to make it absolutely public. I have purposely elaborated its details. I repeat my sacred declaration that every word of it is true—and I do heartily regret that I cannot yet testify to it personally.—R. W."

This letter set the matter at rest. We never doubted it was genuine, or aught but a plain narrative of absolute facts. But the one great question remained—where was William Brook?

It was not answered. The disappearance, which had been a mystery at the beginning, seemed likely to remain a mystery to the end.

Another autumn had come round. Ellin Delorane, feeble now, sat in the church porch, the graveyard lying around her under the hot September sun, soon herself to be laid there. Chancing to take that way round from buying some figs at Salmon's for Hugh and Lena, I saw her, and dashed up the churchyard path.

"You seem to have set up a love for this lively spot, Ellin! You were sitting here the last time I passed by."

"The sun is hot yet, and I get tired, so I come across here for a

rest when out this way," she answered, a sweet smile on her wan face and a red hectic on her thin cheeks. "Won't you stay with me for a little while, Johnny."

"Are you better, Ellin?" I asked, taking my place on the opposite bench, which brought my knees near to hers, for the porch was not much more than big enough for a coffin to pass through.

She gently shook her head as she glanced across at me, a steadfast look in her sad brown eyes. "Don't you see how it is, Johnny? That I shall never be better in this world?"

"Your weakness may take a turn, Ellin; it may indeed. And—*he* may come back yet."

"He will never come back: rely upon that," she quietly said. "He is waiting for me on the Eternal shores."

Her gaze went out afar, over the gravestones and the green meadows beyond, almost (one might fancy) into the blue skies, as if she could see those shores in the distant horizon.

"Is it well to lose hope, Eileen mavourneen?"

"The hope of his returning died out long ago," she answered. "Those dreams that visited me so strangely last year, night after night, night after night, seemed to take *that* from me. Perhaps they came to do it. You remember them, Johnny."

"I cannot think, Ellin, how you could put faith in a parcel of dreams!"

"It was not in the dreams I put faith—exactly. It was in the mysterious influence—I hope I don't speak profanely—which caused me to have the dreams. A silent, undetected influence that I understood not and never grasped—but it was there. Curious dreams they were," she added, after a pause; "curious that they should have come to me. William was always lost, and I, with others, was always searching for him—and never, never found him. They lasted, Johnny, for weeks and months; and almost from the time of their first setting-in, the impression, that I should never see him again, lay latent in my heart."

"Do they visit you still?"

"No. At least, they have changed in character. Ever since the night that he seems to have been really lost, the 19th of October. How you look at me, Johnny!"

"You speak so strangely."

"The subject is strange. I was at Worcester, you know, at Mary West's, and we thought he had come. That night I had the pleasantest dream. We were no longer seeking for him; all the anxiety, the distress of that was gone. We saw him; he seemed to be with us—though yet at a distance. When I awoke, I said in my happiness, 'Ah, those sad dreams will visit me no more, now he is found.' I thought he was, you see. Since then, though the dreams continue, he is never lost in them. I see him always; we are often talking, though we are never very close together. I will be indoors, perhaps, and he

outside in the garden; or maybe I am toiling up a steep hill and he stands higher up. I seem to be *always going towards* him and he to be waiting for me. And though I never quite reach him, they are happy dreams. It will not be very long first now."

I knew what she meant—and had nothing to say to it.

"Perhaps it may be as well, Johnny," she went on in speculative thought. "God does all things for the best."

"Perhaps what may be as well?"

"That he should never have come back to marry me. I do not suppose I should have lived long in any case; I am too much like mamma. And to have been left a widower—perhaps—no, it is best as it is."

"You don't give yourself a chance of getting better, Ellin—cherishing these gloomy views."

"Gloomy! They are not gloomy. I am as happy as I can be. I often picture to myself the glories of the world I am hastening to; the lovely flowers, the trees that overshadow the banks of the pure crystal river, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and the beautiful golden light shed around us by God and the Lamb. Oh, Johnny, what a rest it will be after the weary sorrow here—and the weakness—and the pain!"

"But you should not wish to leave us before your time."

"I do not wish it; it is God who is taking me. I think if I had a wish it would be to stay here as long as papa stays. For I know what my death will be to him. And what it will be to you all," she generously added, holding out her hands to me, as the tears filled her eyes.

I held them for a minute in mine. Ellin took up her parasol, preparatory to moving away; but laid it down again.

"Johnny, tell me—I have often thought I should like to ask you—what do *you* think could have become of William? Have you ever picked up an idea, however faint, of aught that could tend to solve the mystery?"

It was a hard question to answer, and she saw my hesitation.

"I cannot admit that I have, Ellin. When looking at the affair in one light, I whisper to myself 'It might have been this way;' when looking at it in another, I say 'It might have been that.' Difficulties and contradictions encompass it on all sides. One impediment to elucidation was the length of time that elapsed before we began the search in earnest. Had we known from the first that he was really lost, and gone to work then, we might have had a better chance."

Ellin nodded assent. "Marianne Ashton still maintains that it was William she saw that day at the railway station."

"I know she does. She always will maintain it."

"Has it ever struck you, Johnny, in how rather remarkable a way any proof that it was he, or not he, seems to have been withheld?"

"Well, we could not get at any positive proof, one way or the other."

"But I mean that proof seems to *have been withheld*," repeated Ellin. "Take, to begin with, the traveller's luggage: but for its being lost (and we do not know that it was ever found), the name, sure to have been on it, would have told whether its owner was William Brook, or not. Then take Marianne Ashton: had she gained the platform but a few seconds earlier, she would have met the traveller face to face, avoiding all possibility of mistake either way. Next take the meeting of the two gigs that evening when Gregory West was returning from Spetchley. Gregory, a stranger to Worcester until recently, did not know William Brook; but had Philip West himself gone to Spetchley—as he ought to have done—he would have known him. Again, had Philip's groom, Brian, been there, he would have known him: he comes from this neighbourhood, you know. Brian was going with the gig that afternoon, but just as it was starting Philip got a message from a client living at Lower Wick, and he had to send Brian with the answer, so Gregory went alone. You must see how very near proof was in all these moments, yet it was withheld."

Of course I saw it. And there was yet another instance: Had the Squire only pulled up when we passed the gig in Dip Lane, instead of driving on like the wind, we should have had proof that it was, or was not, Brook.

"If it was he," breathed Ellin, "it must have been that night he died. He would not, else, keep away from Timberdale."

My voice dropped to a lower key than hers. "Ellin! Do you really think it was he with St. George?"

"Oh, I cannot say that. If any such thought intrudes itself, I drive it away. I do not like St. George, but I would not be unjust to him."

"I thought St. George was one of your prime favourites."

"He was never that. He used to be very kind to me, especially after William went away, and I liked him for it. But latterly I have taken a most unreasonable dislike to him—and really without any justifiable cause. He worries me—but it is not that."

"Worries you!"

"In pressing me to be his wife," she sighed. "Of course I ought to be grateful: he tells me, he tells papa, that with a new life and new scenes, which he would carry me to, my health might be re-established. Poor papa! Only the other day he said to me, 'My dear, don't you think you might bring yourself to try it,' and I was so silly as to burst into tears. The tears came into papa's eyes too, and he promised never to suggest it to me again."

The tears were trickling down her cheeks, now as she spoke. "What a world of crosses and contradiction it is," she cried, smiling through them as she rose. "And, Johnny, all this is between ourselves, remember."

Yes, it was between ourselves. We strolled across the churchyard to a tomb that stood in a corner facing the western sun. It was of

white marble, aromatic shrubs encircling it within ornamental railings, and an inscription on it to her who lay beneath :

"*Maria, the beloved wife of John Delorane.*"

Ellin lingered on through the frosts of winter. Except that she grew thinner and weaker and her cheeks brighter, there really did not seem to be much the matter. Darbyshire saw her every day, other medical men occasionally, but they could not save her. When the snowdrops were peeping from the ground, and the violets nestled in their mossy shelters, and the trees and hedges began to show signs of budding, tokens of the renewal of life after the death of winter, Ellin passed away to that other life, where there is no death and the flowers bloom for ever. And another inscription was added to the white tombstone in the churchyard :

"*Ellin Maria, the only child of John and Maria Delorane.*"

"You should have seen St. George at the funeral," said Tom Coney to us, as we turned aside after church one hot summer's day to look at the new name on the grave, for we were away from Crabb Cot when she died. "His face was green ; yes, green—hold your tongue, Johnny !—green, not yellow ; and his eyes had the queerest look. You were right, Todhetley ; you used to say, you know, that St. George was wild after poor Ellin."

"Positive of it," affirmed Tod.

"And he can't bear the place now she's gone out of it," continued Tom Coney. "Report says that he means to throw up his post and his prospects, and run away for good."

"Not likely," dissented Tod, tossing his head. "A strong man like St. George does not die of love now-a-days, or put himself out of good things, either. You have been reading romances, Coney."

But Tom Coney was right. When the summer was on the wane St. George bade a final adieu to Timberdale. And if it was his love for Ellin, or her death, that drove him away, he made no mention of it. He told Timberdale that he was growing tired of work and meant to travel. As he had a good income, Timberdale agreed that it was only natural he should grow tired of work and want to travel. So he said adieu, and departed : and Mr. Delorane speedily engaged another head clerk in his place, who was to become his partner later.

St. George wrote to Mr. Delorane from Jamaica, to which place he steamed first, to take a look at his cousins. The letter contained a few words about William Brook. St. George had been instituting inquiries, and he said that, by what he could learn, it was certainly William Brook who was drowned in Kingston harbour the day before he ought to have sailed for England in the Dart. He, St. George, felt perfectly assured of this fact, and also that if any man had sailed in the Idalia under Brook's name, it must have been an impostor who had nefariously substituted himself. St. George added that he was

going "farther afield," possibly to California: he would write again from thence if he arrived without mishap.

No other letter ever came from him. So whether the sea swallowed him up, as, according to his report, it had swallowed his rival, none could tell. But it would take better evidence than that, to convince us William Brook had not come home in the Idalia.

And that is all I have to tell. I know you will deem it most unsatisfactory. Was it William Brook in the gig, or was it not? We found no trace of him after that stormy night: we have found none to this day. And, whether that was he, or was not he, what became of him? Questions never, as I believe, to be solved in this life.

There was a peculiar absence of proof every way, as Ellin remarked; nothing but doubt on all sides. Going over the matter with Darbyshire the other evening, when, as I have already told you, he suggested that I should relate it, we could not, either of us, see daylight through it, any more than we saw it at the time of its occurrence.

There was the certainty (yes, I say so) that Brook landed at Liverpool the evening of the 18th of October; he would no doubt start for home the morning of the 19th, by rail, which would take him through Birmingham to Worcester; there was also what the shopwoman in Bold Street said, though hers might be called negative testimony, as well as the lady's in the train. There was Mrs. James Ashton's positive belief that she saw him arrive that afternoon at Worcester by the Birmingham train, *shake hands* with St. George and talk with him: and there was our recognition of him an hour or two later in St. George's gig in Dip Lane ——

"Hold there, Johnny," cried Darbyshire, taking his long clay pipe from his mouth to interrupt me as I went over the items. "You should say *supposed* recognition."

"Yes, of course. Well, all that points to its having been Brook: you must see that, Mr. Darbyshire. But, if it was in truth he, there's a vast deal that seems inexplicable. Why did he set off to *walk* from Worcester to Timberdale—and on such a night!—why not have gone on by rail? It is incredible."

"Nay, lad, we are told he—that is, the traveller—set off to walk to Evesham. St. George says he put him down in Dip Lane; and Lockett, you know, saw somebody, that seems to answer the description, turn from the lanes into the Evesham road."

I was silent, thinking out my thoughts. Or, rather, not daring to think them out. Darbyshire put his pipe in the fender and went on.

"If it was Brook and no stranger that St. George met at Worcester station, the only possible theory I can form on that point is this, Johnny: that St. George then proposed to drive him home. He may have said to him, 'You walk on, and I will get my gig and overtake you directly:' it is a lame theory, you may say, lad, but it is the only one I can discern, and I have thought of the matter more than you

suppose. St. George started for home earlier than he had meant to start, and this may have been the reason: though *he* says it was because he saw it was going to be so wild a night. Why they should not have gone in company to the Hare-and-Hounds, and started thence in the gig together, is another question."

"Unless Brook, being done up, wished not to show himself at Worcester that day—to get on at once to Timberdale."

Darbyshire nodded: the thought, I am sure, was not strange to him. "The most weighty question of all remains yet, lad: If St. George took up Brook in his gig, what did he do with him? *He* would not want to be put down in Dip Lane to walk to Evesham."

He caught up his churchwarden pipe, relighted it at the fire, and puffed away in silence. Presently I spoke again.

"Mr. Darbyshire, I do not like St. George. I never did. You may not believe me, perhaps, but the first time I ever saw his face—I was a little fellow—I drew back startled. There was something in its expression which frightened me."

"One of your unreasonable dislikes, Johnny?"

"Are they unreasonable? But I have not taken many such dislikes in my life as that one was. Perhaps I might say *any* such."

"St. George was liked by most people."

"I know he was. Anyway, my dislike remained with me. I never spoke of it; no, not even to Tod."

"Liking him or disliking him has nothing to do with the main question—what became of Brook. There were the letters too, sent by the traveller in answer to St. George's advertisements."

"Yes, there were the letters. But—did it ever occur to you to notice that not one word was said in those letters, or one new fact given, that we had not heard before? They bore out St. George's statement, but they afforded no proof that his statement was true."

"That is, Mr. Johnny, you would insinuate, putting it genteelly, that St. George fabricated the answers himself."

"No, not that he did, only that there was nothing in the letters to render it impossible that he did."

"After having fabricated the pretty little tale that it was a stranger he picked up, and what the stranger said to him, and all the rest of it, eh, Johnny?"

"Well"—I hesitated—"as to the letters, it seemed to me to be an unaccountable thing that the traveller could not let even one person see him in private, to hear his personal testimony: say Mr. Delorane, or a member of the Brook family. The Squire went hot over it: he asked St. George whether the fellow thought men of honour carried handcuffs in their pockets. Again, the stranger said he should be at liberty to come forward later, but he never has come."

Darbyshire smoked on. "I'd give this full of gold," he broke the silence with, touching the big bowl of the clay pipe, "to know where Brook vanished to."

My restless fingers had strayed to his old leaden tobacco jar, on the table by me, pressing down its heavy lid and lifting it again. When I next spoke he might have thought the words came out of the tobacco, they were so low.

"Do you think St. George had a grudge against Brook, Mr. Darbyshire?—that he wished him out of the way?"

Darbyshire gave me a look through the wreathing smoke. "Speak out, lad. What have you on your mind?"

"St. George said, you know, that he stopped the gig in Dip Lane at the turning which would lead to Evesham, for Brook—I mean the traveller—to get out. But I thought I heard it stop before that. I was almost sure of it."

"Stop where?"

"Just about opposite the gap in the hedge; hardly even quite as far as that. We had not reached the turning to Evesham ourselves when I heard this. The gig seemed to come to a sudden standstill. I said so to Tod at the time."

"Well?"

"Why should he have stopped just at the gap?"

"How can I tell, lad?"

"I suppose he could not have damaged Brook? Struck him a blow to stun him—or—or anything of that?"

"And if he had? If he (let us put it so) *killed* him, Johnny, what did he do with—what was left of him? What could he do with it?"

Darbyshire paused in his smoking. I played unconsciously with the jar. He was looking at me, waiting to be answered.

"I suppose—if that pond had been dragged—Dip Pond—if it were to be dragged now—that—that—nothing would be found ——"

"Hush, lad," struck in Darbyshire, all hastily. "Walls have ears, people tell us: and we must not even whisper grave charges without sufficient grounds; grounds that we could substantiate."

True: and of course he did right to stop me.

But we cannot stay rebellious thought: and no end of gruesome ideas connected with that night in Dip Lane steal creepingly at times into my mind. If I am not mistaken they steal also into Darbyshire's.

All the same they may be but phantoms of the imagination, and St. George may have been a truthful, an innocent man. You must decide for yourselves, if you can, on which side the weight of evidence seems to lie. I have told you the story as it happened, and I cannot clear up for you what has never yet been cleared for Timberdale. It remains an unsolved mystery.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

# IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.

WE left Allerheiligen in the early morning. The summits of the trees were gilded with a celestial light that threw the lower portions of the valley into yet deeper shadow. The good people in the breakfast-room, in all stages of déshabille, looked after the receding equipage until a turn of the road took it from sight as we wound upwards into the splendid forest gloom, with its intense solitude. Many shades of green refreshed the eye from the springing shrubs and bracken, the trees alone faithful to their own sad tone. Presently, sweeping down again, we crossed a bridge at the foot of the zig-zag fall formed by the waters of the Grindenbach, and rejoicing in the name of the "Seven Cauldrons." The narrow cleft through which it rushes was the effect of an earthquake; certainly so wild, distorted a fissure and mass of rocks could scarcely have been the result of anything less than a convulsion of nature. Finally we passed from the precincts of Allerheiligen, and, like a ship clear of her anchor, felt ourselves fairly under way.

For a time that way led through a wild, narrow valley. On either side nothing seen but a wealth of pine-covered hills; nothing heard but the murmur of a stream, and the soft rustling of the wind in the waving trees. The sad green blended with the pure blue of the far-off sky, so high, so ethereal in this rarefied pine-scented air. The glowing sun, by kissing the swaying branches, did his utmost to turn their melancholy into laughter. But, journeying in broad daylight, this melancholy casts no gloom upon the mind of the traveller. Rather it sheds forth a repose grateful to the eye, restoring to the nerves, refreshing to the spirit. Soon you grow to love the pines, "with a mute affection;" to miss them where they are not. After a day or two's sojourn in a Black Forest town, you long for the wild freedom of the woods, their unrestrained influences, their long, love

vistas, chequered by deep lights and shadows; above all, their grand, restful solitudes—the latter a feature that should be made conspicuous by reiteration.

To all wanting change of scene, tired with town life—wearying from its very superabundance—the Black Forest offers healing influences of a sure kind. Especially it commends itself to the pedestrian. With a companion, rather than alone, to break the monotony of silence, and to share his impressions, he may throw himself into the shady depths during the scorching mid-day hour, and while away the time in a thousand fancies. In such gratefully cool retreat he will revel in the pine scents, the pure air, the deep silence, the flashes of blue sky that open and close as the trees above him sway in the wind. All the while his delicious rest and reveries are undisturbed, unbroken, unmolested by intrusion. Health is taken in with every passing hour; troubles (show me the happy man without them) fall off and are forgotten; he enters into the purest happiness, of a selfish sort, that exists.

We passed through a narrow, wooded valley for a considerable distance, until, at Oppenau, the hills opened out and became more fertile. This morning it was a smiling, sunny valley, all lights and shades. Oppenau seemed a thriving little town, and like some others in the Forest, was destroyed by the French in the seventeenth century. We clattered noisily through the long street bordered by white houses, with their gabled roofs and green shutters: a noise that never fails to bring the good folk with haste to their doors. For curiosity is not confined to one particular people or country, but seems indigenous to the feminine element of all nations.

We did not stay to gratify any curiosity beyond a mere gaze and a wonder, but hurried on towards Petersthal. Here we are in the region of the "Kniebis Baths," a colony of watering-places much frequented, and quite fashionable in their way during the summer season. People come to drink the waters, a combination of iron and carbonic acid gas, not particularly agreeable to the taste. But what will not man go through to heal real or imaginary ills? The hypochondriac, indeed, is most of all to be pitied, for his ills are beyond remedy. "You cannot minister to a mind diseased."

The watering-places, five in number, are Freiersbach, Petersthal, Griesbach, Antogast, and Rippoldsau. Petersthal was one of the few places where women went about in costumes; wonderful head-dresses, something like inflated Alsatian bows; angels with wings, but wings, from their position, more suggestive of horns—not usually worn by angels. Some of these costumes in distant parts of Europe (not that the Black Forest is distant, but where the railway has not penetrated, it is so for all practical purposes—unsophisticated and primitive)—some of these costumes, I say, in far-away places, are as heathenish as the tattooing and painting savages delight in: utterly beyond all common sense and beauty.

The road now gradually ascended; we journeyed in all the glory of the midday sun. Higher and higher we went, more and more beautiful grew the view. We rose into a pure, light atmosphere which influenced the spirits like sparkling wine. The valley widened and expanded, the eye roamed with delight over vast stretches of wooded slopes.

So we reached Griesbach, where, said the coachman, he must needs halt a couple of hours for the sake of the cattle. The spot was of extreme beauty, and for hours he might well have substituted days. It was surprising to see here so large and imposing an hotel, and to be told by the landlord that in the season it was far too small to accommodate the crowds of invalids, malades imaginaires, &c., who flock to Griesbach for the waters. Nearly the end of the season, comparatively few people were remaining; the others, like swallows in autumn, had taken flight. But the sensible swallows go to warmer climes; many of the Griesbach visitors migrate towards the cardinal point, homewards.

Yet somewhat more than a mere handful of visitors still lingered. Table d'hôte was over, and opposite the hotel, in the open air, beside the running stream, ladies were drinking coffee, laughing and flirting with gentlemen, supremely idle and supremely happy. You saw directly at least one of the reasons why Griesbach is popular and frequented. A pavilion contained billiard-tables, and the balls were knocked about with a strength that suggested nothing of the invalid, or else that the waters had done good service. The ladies were dressed in the height of fashion—even here: and English, French, and German might be heard around.

Matches, said the landlord, were continually being formed in Griesbach; and the assertion was not to be doubted. But the course of true love did not always run smoothly. Sometimes the parents objected on one side or the other, and the consequences, as the children say in their play, "were fatal." Tears, entreaties, rage, anger, domestic storms, packing up and flight, occasionally diversified the even tenour of the Griesbach social atmosphere. But in these days distance is comparative; it yields more easily than the opposition of an inhuman parent; and though flight may interrupt the course of love for a time, it is only gaining by a temporary lull fresh strength for victory.

The hotel looked comfortable and well-appointed. Light, airy rooms, all white paint and cheerful tones, were not without their influence upon the mind. The dining-room was large, long, and capable of seating a great crowd: I trembled at thought of the noise that must often echo within its four walls. Below, a large hall contained the wells, a square enclosure, like a small swimming-bath, where an attendant handed up at the end of a long pole a glass of the sparkling but noxious liquid, which seemed principally to combine the flavours of ink and bad eggs.

But Griesbach, apart from the waters, must be a pleasant resting

place. Yet the hotel, surrounded by hills (for though we had ascended from Petersthal, we never seemed to get nearer the tops of the mountains), suggested that in summer it must be oppressive. The landlord, however, said it was not so. In the hottest weather they had a breeze, whilst shade might always be found: cool avenues with overarching trees, under the hill side, where you might sit or lounge all day long, and listen to the rushing water, and read a favourite book, and inhale the scent of the pines. Again, they were so far above the sea level that the air was always light and sparkling. All who came to Griesbach departed the better for their visit: and people returned to it year after year—as we go back to our first loves, when, attracted to others by our fickle nature, we have found them wanting. Certainly, as far as could be seen, everything was done at the hotel to make a visit agreeable.

From the slopes behind the hotel magnificent views met the eye. The hills fall back in wooded ranges, varied by cultivated fields, where women worked in the blazing sun: picturesque dots in the landscape in their white caps, blue petticoats, and pink handkerchiefs crossed over the shoulders. Far up the opposite range, the merry ring of the woodman's axe—always a pleasant sound—might be heard, and the voice of the running stream never ceased. The broad, white winding road looked hot and sleepy in the sunshine. It is surprising how excellent these roads are, all through the Black Forest.

The woods were much thinner here than in many other parts. The landlord—my present oracle—said it was because the timber trade flourished in Griesbach. In some districts, the trees cut down had to be replaced with young ones; so that the woods are ever green, ever growing. Here it was not so; and the cleared places have been turned into fields and vineyards. "Ill blows the wind that profits nobody," says Shakespeare; and these fields and vineyards give work to men and women who might otherwise find it hard to gain a livelihood.

Mine host seemed enterprising; one of those energetic temperaments—not quite universal in these days—who do not let the grass grow under their feet. In winter, when Griesbach is deserted, the waters cease to allure, and the hotel is closed, he turns his thoughts to the timber trade. The busy bee gathers most honey; and mine host of Griesbach no doubt finds that landlords, unlike cobblers, are not the better for sticking to their last. Two heads are better than one—why not two trades? But whatever he may find, he was so kind and attentive, escorting me about the slopes, showing me all the small lions of the place, devoting his time when I could see that he had work on hand, and doing it all so readily, that I felt it would be a pleasure some day to become the guest of this kind host for a whole week.

In the valley a large saw-mill was at work—also belonging to

the landlord. An old-fashioned, picturesque water-wheel creaked and cracked, slowly turned by the stream, moving the machinery within that cut up the trees into planks. The flying sawdust scattered abroad the perfume of the pine. As almost always in the Black Forest, the men did their best to welcome an intruder, and show him anything there might be to examine. The somewhat rough machinery did its work well; but it was the atmosphere of the place caused one to linger, and the pleasant swish of the saw as it penetrated the wood. These mills are great institutions in the Black Forest, and are worthy a visit; the men greet you so civilly: and neither time nor distance obliterates the remembrance of the perfume.

It was almost my last impression of Griesbach. Soon after, we were once more on the road. And now occasionally we seemed to get more on a level with the tops of the mountains, looked down upon vast pine forests, a deep smiling valley with its onrushing stream; occasional villages—like angels' visits to the earth; more saw-mills. Roadside houses like milestones marked the way; evidences, amidst all this extent of hill and valley and forestland, that even here the short and simple annals of many a human life were being played out.

Amidst a repetition of such scenes—for in the Black Forest you must expect something of sameness, though without monotony—we journeyed through the afternoon. The horses, after their long mid-day rest, travelled bravely. Towards evening we reached Rippoldsau, and the end of our second day's journey.

If the extent of the hotel at Griesbach was surprising, still more so was that at Rippoldsau. It appeared endless. And here the season still seemed in full flow. The place was thronged with visitors, full of bustle and excitement. People were running to and fro. Everyone was doing something with a will, if only idly lounging and smoking in a chair. The long dining-room at night was crowded with people at supper; many others were taking it al frseco. When I first arrived, little groups and parties were seated in the open space before the hotel at small round tables. Ladies were chatting and working; gentlemen chatting and smoking; children "disporting" themselves, and making everyone thoroughly uncomfortable and misanthropic, except the fond and foolish parents.

Having heard much of the restoring properties of the baths, it seemed the right thing to test their virtues after a long day's journey. A man-servant acted as pilot through endless passages. At length, when I began to wonder whether these subterranean mazes would lead to an intermediate world, I was duly consigned (like a bale of goods) to the tender mercies of a bath-woman. Seizing a long bit of wood, she turned on the water, and began splashing about, the verisimilitude of another Fury; and like a witch in Macbeth, stirred up the cauldron with her stick. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," I expected to hear her mutter in haggard tones, and

looked if some grimalkin with fiery eyes and arched back kept guard upon her shoulder.

But no. She seemed a peaceful woman enough; it was only her way. Just as these better thoughts in her favour were arising, a shrill cry without announced, with as much noise as those terrible trumpeters in "Lohengrin" heralding the break of day, that "THE COUNTESS WAS COMING!"

Immediately all was excitement and confusion. The bath-woman turned pale, dropped her witch's stick, deserted her post, rushed out to greet THE COUNTESS. I followed, and beheld a German giantess

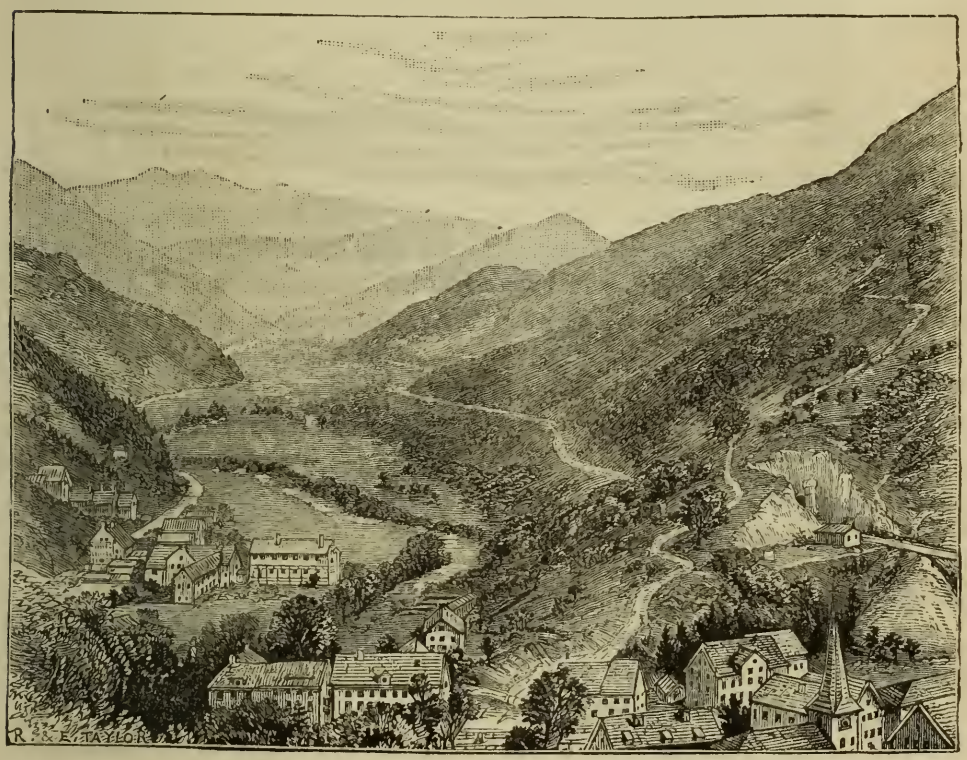
HORNBERG.

in full sail, accompanied by a maid carrying a huge bag. As a truthful historian, I am bound to record that she was ugly; no other word will describe this lady's charms; possibly she was amiable. The bath-woman backed and bobbed before the Countess just as one does before royalty; and the giantess swept into her bath-room as if the world had been made for her, and for her alone. It was some time before order reigned once more, and anything beneath a Countess received attention.

Rippoldsau is evidently more lively and frequented than Griesbach, there is a little more going on, and it seems more popular. It is 2,000 feet above the level of the sea, and rejoices in a pure, bright air. The somewhat narrow valley is surrounded by densely wooded heights, yet after the lonely roads and forest solitudes that you have

traversed and loved for days, to come suddenly upon this lively settlement and crowd of visitors is at the first moment oppressive with a sense of suffocation and restraint.

The previous rest, repose, and seclusion have vanished for a time. All this might be the life and activity of a fashionable watering-place; it seems out of character with the Black Forest, and is resented accordingly. In the open space enclosing the three sides of the great white building, people are sitting at small tables, taking their favourite beverage, in full enjoyment of "le grand air." Visitors form themselves into groups and coteries; social merriment reigns. Music



GUTACHTHAL.

is in force at night, and sometimes dancing. Sentimental couples pace the avenues, and under cover of the darkness make love and eternal vows. If there is a moon they gaze at it in concert.

> "In full orbed glory, yonder moon divine
> Rolls through the dark-blue depths."

So wrote Southey; and this and much more, concealed to ordinary eyes, lovers apparently discover in the attractions of the Queen of Night. Their paradise is very sweet while it lasts; and awakening to realities is, after all, good discipline.

The most imposing personage (after the Countess) was the policeman; so grand in gold braid, so gentlemanly in appearance, it was puzzling to mark his rank. As night advanced, I found myself walking his beat, and joined him in the shady avenue, under the stars.

He gave me all his history, private and public, domestic and official. It is so pleasant to get at the lives of those you thus casually meet; to learn their joys and sorrows; for a moment hold out to them the hand of sympathy or encouragement. None can tell what good it may do; how a few words in the right place may chance to turn upwards the scale in a life that was going down. Sympathy is so hard to find; at best it is administered with so little delicacy; and it is just those that need it who can ill stand the rough handling of the world. If the exercise of the fellow-feeling that makes us wondrous kind does nothing more, at least it keeps our sympathies alive, our hearts green. And in that day when for us the silver cord is loosed, and the pitcher has gone to the fountain for the last time, we shall be none the worse for having held out to others the right hand of fellowship. I have often dived into many histories of such people—seen for a moment, then gone for ever—and never once was made to feel that any interest shown, any questions asked, any details entered into were thought intrusive, but much, very much the opposite.

At Rippoldsau the policeman is there only for the season, to assist in keeping the peace that was never known to be broken. He patrols up and down, knows all, chats with all, and passes a very pleasant time. This especial guardian of the place was too refined and gentle for his office. It was impossible to realize him in the act of marching off a refractory character to solitary confinement. His time was nearly up, for the season was on the wane, and he said he should not be sorry to go. He was getting a little tired of the life; was wearying—as the Scotch say so quaintly—for his wife and bairns. Quite a glow came into his voice as he spoke of them: there were his treasures, there was his heart. There are some things right in the world after all: it is not utterly crooked, has not all to be made straight.

Of course there was a band at Rippoldsau. There is a band for he season in all these places: a terrible, an impossible band. This was, without exception, the most terrible and impossible band ever heard: the most melancholy. The performers all looked as miserable as their music sounded. When they began their evening duty, just beneath my windows, without warning—so silently had they taken their seats—I thought the place had suddenly gone mad. Soon I felt that I was going mad myself. Indescribable wails filled the air. For a whole hour these unearthly sounds went on; but long before that hour expired, I had fled to the mountains in sheer self-defence.

Here, too, the woodman's axe was doing its work. The lower slopes, immediately above the valley, were bare of everything but a few fruit trees. Small apples, whose branches grew on a level with the hillside path; tempting by reason of their looks, and because it needed only to raise the hand and pluck them. Small, picturesque houses dotted the slopes and the valley, and I wondered how the inmates fared in winter; for, on taking a short cut downwards, I found myself, at every step, sinking, like Christian, into a Slough of Despond.

At an unearthly hour next morning, the melancholy musicians again went through their performances as though every air played was one more nail in their coffin. If they resembled the lark in no other sense, at least they imitated him in the matter of early rising. "And soaring every singest," could not be said of them as of Shelley's lark; rather they took themselves and their hearers into unimagined depths—of misery and anguish. Suddenly a window at right angles with mine was opened, and a bass voice in distressed quavers shouted out above the wailing of the catgut, in unmistakable English: "Man wants but little here below, nor wants that little long." I hastened for a sight of the philosopher, but the oracle having spoken, had withdrawn, and the casement was closed again. The players evidently took it for a compliment—though an empty one, since it did not rain gold—for they raised between them the ghost of a smile, and wailed on more determinedly than ever.

Early that morning we left Rippoldsau, and fine weather still smiled upon us. If there were clouds, it was merely those white fleecy visitants that add so much to the beauty of earth and sky, bringing out the deep blue of the one, throwing strong lights and shades upon the other. We wound about hill after hill of densely wooded pines; or, descending to the level of the vale, ran side by side with the flowing stream; wooded slopes above us, before us, behind us, around us; the trees waving and murmuring as the breeze took them, making, with the ripple of the water, a harmony of sounds that seems to form a connecting link in nature—the winds and waves, the forests and laughing valleys—binding them eternally to each other.

Klösterle was soon left behind, and its church with twin towers, built on the ruins of an old Benedictine monastery; a small, scattered village, where people stay to avoid the greater expense of Rippoldsau, or when its more formidable rival is overflowing. Presently the valley opened out to make room for the picturesque village of Seebach, reposing snugly under the shelter of the pine hills; a quaint lovely spot, its gabled pointed houses primitive and old-world like, the valley rich in fruit trees and smiling fields.

Next came Shapbach, a straggling village where, for the most part, the ground floor of the houses is converted into stables and given up to the cows and horses, the inhabitants modestly retiring to the upper portion of their dwellings; then Wolfach, the latter a small picturesque town celebrated for its pine-cone baths, a remedy said to be luxuriously delicious. Toujours perdrix is not desirable; and so, in spite of the beauties of nature, it was pleasant to pass through these villages and towns, note their quaint houses, and watch the people at their daily work: these hewers of wood and drawers of water. The timber trade is carried on extensively in this district also; saw-mills have their place—and trees their time for falling.

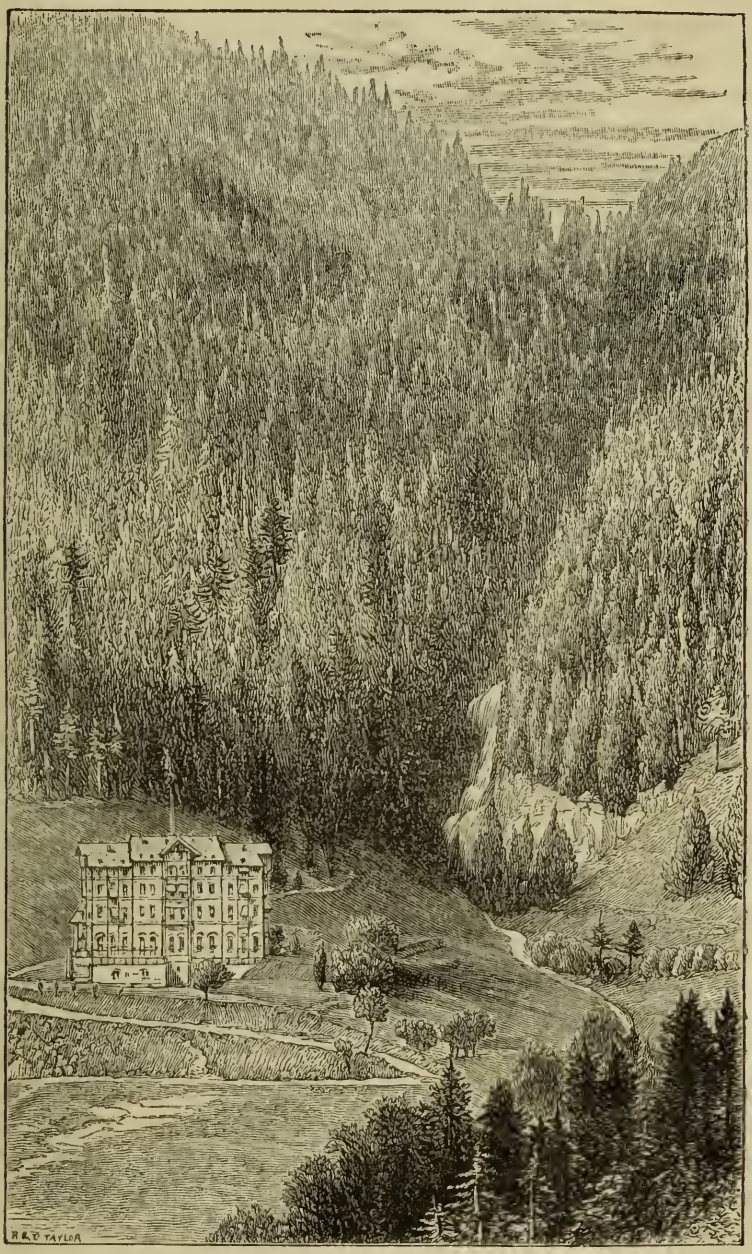
About midday Hornberg was reached, an old town of a certain

size and importance, in situation still more favoured than either Rippoldsau or Griesbach; far more open; reposing in a great amphitheatre of hills, at the foot of the principal Black Forest chain. Here we stayed some hours, and amongst other interesting visits the

WATERFALL, TRIBERG.

landlord of the inn escorted me over his workshop, and showed me all the mysteries of the Black Forest carving. Men and boys were turning, chiselling, and cutting out with delicate tools and wonderful dexterity. It was curious to watch a small block of wood rapidly assume proportions under skilful hands: a shapeless piece take the form

of an angel's wing, another the head of an eagle with outstretched pinions. The men, not all equally clever, seemed all equally happy and contented with their lot. If the master pointed out one more than usually gifted, he was certain to be unlike the others in a greater



SCHWARZWALD HOTEL, TRIBERG.

refinement and delicacy of look; showing that Nature bestows not with unsparing hand; but, holding the scales of justice, administers therefrom her gifts.

Hornberg is very much like an overgrown village. Its principal street quaint with gabled houses, old-fashioned windows, and long

rows of shutters that stare at you like sentinels. But it is thriving and industrious. There are factories given up to glass work and the making of common pottery or china; tall chimneys now and then send forth clouds of black smoke, a discordant element amidst these beauties of nature. Far more artistic and interesting are the workshops for wood-carving, where the men, leading pleasant lives in the cultivation and production of the beautiful, should rejoice in the gift they possess. But for it, they might, like many of their brethren, pass their lives in blasting rocks and breaking stones for the roads.

A wooded height overlooking the town is crowned by the ruins of an old castle, where a princess of Wurtemberg is said to have languished out her life in exile. From one point four valleys open out, the Gutachthal, with magnificent hills stretching upwards, in broad, expansive outlines, a silvery stream running its course, whilst the far end of the valley is bounded by another chain, dim and hazy in outline, cleaving the sky. Towards Triberg you may trace a long line of steam, and almost fancy you hear the on rushing of the train, as, far above the level of the road, it twists and turns like a snake amongst the pine hills.

This same train reminded me that time was passing. Lovely as was the view, it was impossible to gaze upon it for ever, like the poor exiled princess. Charming landscapes take us out of ourselves and the world as soon as anything; but in the "eternal fitness of things" there is a time for abstaining even from contemplating the beauties of nature. Down the rugged way, and coming right into the backyards of old houses, whence assuredly all romance had fled, I found myself in the quaint old street. It was quiet enough. A few people were strolling, rather than hurrying, about their business; others were lounging at their doors, talking to opposite neighbours, recording, it may be, the small chronicles and excitements of their lives. But the general air and impression of the place was one of repose—as it should be in these far-away mountain nooks.

Back to the inn, where the landlord had prepared the best cup of coffee I found in all the Black Forest—a small record with which he ought to be credited. Then Jehu came round with the carriage, and with a melancholy smile remarked, as we started, that our last stage had commenced. It had been a particularly pleasant drive. Excepting the contretemps at the outset, all had gone merrily as a marriage bell. The coachman, perhaps as a sort of "amende honorable," a repentance bearing fruit—alas! not always the case with us—had outdone himself in civility and obliging efforts. Sunshine and blue skies had brightened our path. This is absolutely indispensable to the enjoyment of the Black Forest; no place can be worse in wet, gloomy, cloudy weather. A melancholy falls upon nature the most cheerful temperament must yield to; mists arise and fogs surround you; all the views, near or distant, the woods, outlines and undulations, are obliterated. A wind creeps down the

valleys and searches you out; and probably the next halting place will yield no fire to restore animation.

The way from Hornberg to Triberg was perhaps the most picturesque bit of the whole drive. The Black Forest railway here twists and turns about the hills; now close to our left hand, far above the level, and now, in a few moments, as by magic, on the opposite heights. Small farms or settlements; here and there a small church; fruit trees in abundance. A few country people in quaint costumes passed us on the road, and—a pleasant and general custom in the Forest—took off their hats and wished one good day in a voice that seemed to say they were at peace with all mankind.

So we reached Triberg; and winding round by the railway station, up between the hills, entered the long steep street of the thriving little town. Jehu was now on his own territories, his dignity at stake; he cracked his whip and dashed upwards in a way that brought all sorts of heads to all sorts of windows. The hotel was at the further end of the town. A turn to the left, a sharp, short ascent, and our journey was over.

The Schwarzwald Hotel was romantically placed. Apart from the town, it stood alone on the hill side. Fir woods stretched upwards behind it; a waterfall ran its course within a few minutes' walk, almost the prettiest fall in the Black Forest. It forced its way between pine-fringed rocks, ferns and bracken beautified the wild, rugged sides. Dashing noisily over great boulders, emptying its various cascades into seething pools, it finally escaped and rushed through the principal streets of the town in two swiftly flowing channels, so wide that boards or planks were placed over them before the doors, to enable one to cross the road.

Triberg is a rallying point for visitors from all parts of the Black Forest. People make for it from Baden on the one side, from Switzerland on the other. Thus it is quite fashionable and crowded. Amongst other good turns, the coachman had telegraphed for a room, and they had reserved one with a balcony and a charming outlook over the town and the waterfall, the valley and surrounding hills. But the hotel was so crowded that before ten o'clock at night, everyone was turned out of the reading-room, beds were extemporized on sofas and chairs—and one pitied those who had to occupy them. One unfortunate traveller was drafted on to a balcony, where he must have kept company with the spirits of the mist, so blue and shivering did he look the next morning.

If adversity makes us acquainted with strange bed-fellows, so travelling sometimes extends our experience to the eccentricities of time and place.

# MRS. MONTAGU'S GOVERNESS.

## I.

HARRY sat on the hearthrug tormenting an unlucky kitten; Dollie, Teddy, and Tim, in the window-recess, were enacting the story of Daniel in the lions' den, but departing from the text of the Scripture narrative, inasmuch as the lions, Teddy and Tim, were commencing to gnaw Daniel, each having introduced a fat little arm into his mouth; against which innovation their victim was protesting with all the power of his lungs, not altogether, it is to be feared, upon the ground of principle. Guy stood beside the table, learning a spelling lesson at the top of his voice, while Ethel, under cover of the table-cloth, was creeping along with a big pin, which would presently make acquaintance with the calves of Guy's legs. Their distracted mother, Mrs. Montagu, sat in their midst, the baby on her lap rattling a big bunch of keys.

At last the pin reached its destination, and the youthful operator was fully rewarded for any slight expenditure of trouble, for Master Guy jumped at least a foot high, and shrieked enough to bring the house down. The noise so startled Harry that he dropped the cat, which made off for the door, after bestowing a deep scratch upon the young hero's hand by way of a parting attention; he wept long and sore, and the poor frightened baby, letting fall the keys, wailed in harmony—or out of it; while poor Mrs. Montagu would have liked to shed tears also.

In time all the noisy little mischief-makers were despatched to bed, but was it surprising that their unhappy mother was worn out, pale, and tearful at the end of the day?

"I suppose those young rebels have been half killing you?" began her husband, as soon as the dinner was over and the pair were left alone. "I have no doubt that Ethel has been feeding the baby with ashes, Guy and Harry having a stand-up fight, and all the rest making noise enough for Bedlam."

This picture was so far below the reality that Mrs. Montagu discreetly forbore to make any reply.

"Well! something must be done. I've spoken of it before, and now the thing *shall* be done," resumed the oracle. "We'll have a governess for them."

And rising from his seat, Mr. Montagu reached paper, pen, and ink, and forthwith drew up an advertisement, which he read aloud.

"Wanted, a Governess. Learning and accomplishments of no consequence: strength of arm the only indispensable qualification. Apply, &c."

"Robert, state the facts; sweet and talented children, but their education rather neglected."

"Humph!" ejaculated the husband, in a tone that savoured of scepticism.

It was according to the notions of neither parent precisely that the notice was eventually drawn up; but one was at last written out and despatched by that very night's post, and in due course it appeared in the columns of the *Times* newspaper.

To that advertisement in the course of the next few days exactly eighty-four replies were received, and what the ultimate decision would have been it would be hard to say, but for the intervention of a chance circumstance.

One afternoon as Mrs. Montagu sat in the dining-room, for the twentieth time turning over the various letters of application, a servant entered, carrying upon his tray a lady's visiting-card, bearing the words, "Miss Marion Lockhart."

It was the name of one of the applicants for the situation of governess. "Good gracious! Will the whole eighty-four call?" exclaimed Mrs. Montagu, and in her dismay would have gone straight off into a fainting-fit, but that there was no person at hand to recover her; so postponing the troublesome ceremony, she hastened to the drawing-room to her visitor. "Pray sit down," she said, indicating a chair near the fire, while she herself sank upon a couch opposite.

"Thank you; I have ventured to call because I cannot afford delay in finding a fresh situation," replied the stranger, timidly. "I hope it does not inconvenience you to see me."

"Not in the least. I am glad you have called," replied the elder lady, who was pleased with her new acquaintance. The girl's pleasant, well-modulated voice and graceful manner were attractive; her dress was simple and neat, and her face, Mrs. Montagu came to the conclusion, was without exception the most beautiful she had ever seen. In repose it was sad, as though its owner, young as she was, had known sorrow and suffering in no common measure.

Miss Lockhart at once proceeded to state her qualifications. These were perfectly satisfactory, and just as the young lady was concluding her story, Mrs. Montagu heard a welcome sound in the hall. It was her husband's step, and his return from town at the moment was most opportune. Excusing herself briefly to her visitor, Mrs. Montagu flew to consult with her husband.

After hearing her account of the candidate, Robert Montagu followed his wife into the drawing-room. Miss Lockhart could not fail to be aware that his entrance was for the purpose of inspection, but the knowledge did not seem to disconcert her in the least. On the contrary, she conversed with them easily and naturally for a few minutes, and then rose to take leave.

"You will write, then, Mrs. Montagu, to Lady Ringwood? I

suppose you will be satisfied with her recommendation alone?" added Miss Lockhart, hesitatingly, and it was the first sign of nervousness that she had betrayed. "I have lived with her for four years."

"Certainly; it will be quite sufficient," said Mrs. Montagu. And there the interview would have ended, but Mr. Montagu had suddenly a fresh suggestion to make.

"My dear," said he, turning to his wife, "you are going into town this week; could you not go to-morrow and call in Portland Place?"

"It may not be convenient to Lady Ringwood to see me," said Mrs. Montagu, colouring a little with bashfulness. "She is leaving for Mentone in a few days, for the benefit of her husband's health."

"Pray call!" cried Miss Lockhart, eagerly. "If it is not putting you to too much trouble, I should like you to speak to Lady Ringwood; and she, I am sure, would prefer it to writing," concluded the young lady with confidence; and she spoke the truth.

The distance from Freshfield to London was but a matter of twenty miles or thereabouts, and it was still early when Mrs. Montagu found her way next day to Portland Place, where she met with a kind reception. Lady Ringwood and Laura Montagu moved in very different spheres of society, but both were essentially good women, and they understood one another instinctively.

Of Miss Lockhart, Lady Ringwood spoke with the most cordial commendation. "I can only say, Mrs. Montagu, that I myself regard Miss Lockhart with feelings of affection and esteem. Her management of children is wonderful. Mine adore her, yet she is in many respects very strict with them. I feel parting with her deeply and have offered to make arrangements to keep her; but she prefers to be independent, perhaps justly. The truth is that I can hardly discuss Miss Lockhart under the form of employer and employed; she has been more of a friend to me."

Naturally, as the upshot of the interview, Miss Lockhart was engaged by Mrs. Montagu, it being further arranged that she should go down to Freshfield upon the following Monday to enter upon her new duties.

Mrs. Montagu found Miss Lockhart all that Lady Ringwood had declared her, and more. She kept all those unruly little people in check, yet made them happy; and very shortly her clever help and sweet temper had rendered her indispensable to Mrs. Montagu, who could no longer have imagined existence without her invaluable governess's aid and support.

## II.

Time went on, bringing no changes into that quiet house at Freshfield. At length, after a couple of years of this peaceful monotony, a small event was in prospect which promised to vary the

order of things. This was the return home, after ten years' absence in India, of Mr. Talbot North, Mrs. Montagu's only brother; and that little lady, grown, since her introductory struggle, younger and plumper, thanks to Miss Lockhart's care, was in a happy flutter of expectation.

It was Sunday night, a fair moonlit Sabbath evening, and Mr. and Mrs. Montagu had gone to church, leaving Miss Lockhart at home imparting a little theological instruction to their numerous offspring. As Miss Lockhart was thus engaged, her attention was caught by the sound of a footstep on the gravel walk without; the next moment the hall bell was sharply pulled. It was followed by a brief dialogue between some new-comer and the only maid-servant at home; which terminated simultaneously with the appearance of the stranger in the drawing-room. This unexpected and unknown visitor was a tall handsome man of about thirty or thirty-five years of age; and, as he stood within the doorway surveying the wondering group about the table, he smiled in an amused fashion.

At once it rushed across Miss Lockhart's mind who was the unseasonable intruder: and meanwhile the new-comer had not all the gazing to himself, for the children's six pairs of eyes were riveted upon him in unmitigated astonishment.

Finally the gentleman spoke. "Do you not know me?" asked he, laughing delightedly.

"I think you must be Mr. North," answered Miss Lockhart, half rising from her seat.

"And you, I am sure, are Miss Lockhart," said Mr. North, for it was no other than Mrs. Montagu's brother who had returned at this inopportune moment. "By name, at least, you are exceedingly well-known to me," continued the young man, as he came forward with frankly outstretched hand.

"You Uncle Talbot!" exclaimed Guy, in tones of manifest disapproval and disappointment, for their Indian uncle had been a species of hero to them. "Come back like that! Why, you might be anybody!"

Miss Lockhart, looking at the young man standing before her in his splendid strength, with his engaging debonnaire expression of countenance, could not endorse Master Guy's discerning judgment.

"Have you dined, Mr. North?" inquired she, as it occurred to her that she ought to play hostess in Mrs. Montagu's absence. "What will you take?"

"Nothing at present, thank you, except a cup of tea, if I can have one."

So Miss Lockhart, mindful of her responsibilities, made the tea and brought him a cup with her own hands, North watching the process, and admiring her dainty grace while she was at work. She was dressed to-night only in a plain dark woollen gown, but it fell about her slender form in soft, undulating folds as she moved across

the room, while about her neck was drawn a white handkerchief of filmy lace, the quaint style of which set off her peculiar beauty. Talbot North found himself noting all these details with extreme interest. Every pulse of Talbot North's being would long beat to the slight incidents of that evening; every word spoken was graven upon his heart in letters of enduring stone.

Mr. North had just finished drinking his tea when a slight commotion in the hall announced the return of the church-goers. Miss Lockhart rose in haste. "I had better go and tell Mrs. Montagu," she said, and left the room.

In a moment Mrs. Montagu had reached the drawing-room, and her plump little form was clasped in her brother's arms.

"Oh, Talbot! you promised to write or telegraph. Imagine our being gone to church and everything! What have you had?"

"Miss Lockhart very kindly gave me a cup of tea," answered North.

"A cup of tea!" exclaimed Mrs. Montagu with a shriek of horror. "A cup of tea after coming from Bombay! Good gracious! we must have supper at once. And for me to be out when you arrived! I could cry. Where are your belongings? Shall we send to the station for them?"

"I have nothing but a hand-bag. An accident detained me in Paris, and they left by a previous train. I suppose they will turn up all in good time."

## III.

It was only a very few days later that Mr. Montagu, talking alone with his wife, suddenly started a novel idea in an inquiry he made; and although the question was put in joking form, it was none the less suggestive.

"My dear, are you prepared to lose your invaluable governess, and to receive her in the new relation of sister-in-law?"

"What do you mean, Robert?"

"Does nothing strike you with regard to Talbot and Miss Lockhart?"

"Talbot likes Miss Lockhart, and respects her, as we all do, but there is nothing more between them that I see."

"Talbot likes Miss Lockhart very particularly, and *not* as we all do," retorted Mr. Montagu, laughing. "Her sentiments are, to my mind, the only doubtful point in the affair," added the speaker, thoughtfully.

"A royal princess would be proud to marry Talbot," said that gentleman's sister fondly, and the belief was not so very remarkable, for Talbot North, with his charm of manner and his sunny temper, was a universal favourite. "But Talbot might have looked higher
n a girl in Marion Lockhart's position," concluded Mrs. Montagu,
ittle regretfully.

"She will make him an excellent wife," said Mr. Montagu, with commendable common sense and right feeling.

"No one says otherwise," returned his partner, in gentle reproach. "The marvel to me is that Talbot has not married before."

The very contingency that had seemed so impossible in his sister's judgment came to pass. Mr. North made a formal proposal of marriage to Miss Lockhart, and was rejected. Her refusal was firm and decided; but, on the other hand, it was given with evident emotion; seeing which, North took heart of grace, and, in concluding the interview, spoke hopefully of a different result in the future.

"I shall plead my cause again, Miss Lockhart; I deserve my present failure, because in my eagerness I have spoken too soon."

"I wish I could persuade you that my answer is quite final," replied Miss Lockhart, with a distress of manner that was in strong opposition to the tranquil confidence of his tones and mien. "You must indeed go away and forget me."

"Forget you!" he returned, in a voice tremulous with earnestness. "My darling, I shall never forget you while the world stands."

Moving her head from side to side as though seeking some visible refuge in which to hide her distress, she stood in silence for a few minutes while her companion awaited her next words with an impatient anxiety.

"If you only knew it, I am unworthy of your least regard: of a moment's interest!" she said at length, with a cry of anguish. "Put me out of your thoughts, give me no place in your heart," she resumed, after a space of silence. "I do not want you to hate me, but you must forget me. And let this interview be our last meeting," she added, in a broken voice. Then giving one quick, deprecatory glance into his face, which pain and trouble were beginning to darken, Marion stole from the room.

## IV.

Avoiding the drawing-room, with its cheerful atmosphere of talk and music, Mr. North chose to pass the evening of that momentous day alone in the library, an apartment little affected by any member of that unstudious household. Long he sat there immersed in thought, reviewing the events of the afternoon. A sanguine man by nature, and desperately anxious for success in this matter, he was very loth to give up the hope of winning Marion Lockhart for his wife; yet the conviction would force itself upon his mind that her refusal was, as she had declared, final.

An interruption came at length in the shape of a light tap at the door, startling North in the midst of his gloomy reflections.

"Come in," he called out impatiently.

Thereupon the handle of the door was softly turned; the door itself was next pushed wide, and carefully again closed and latched; and

then North raised his eyes to see who the intruder upon his sad soli tude might be. Immediately a great change came over his countenance, and a smile sprang to his lips.

His visitor was his own fair beloved, looking lovelier even than her wont as she advanced with a slight flush of crimson upon each cheek, and her slender fingers interlacing themselves in palpable embarrassment. Observing her expression and hesitation, Mr. North came to a happy conclusion in his own mind, and going forward took her tenderly by the hand. She made no resistance; but, whatever the saying she had come to deliver, it did not seem easy of utterance, for although her lips parted once or twice, no sound came from them.

"You mistook your own feelings this morning," cried North at length in the face of her silence, his voice subdued, joy thrilling in every tone. "You have come to tell me that you are going to bless me with some morsel of hope."

"I should hardly come to tell you that," answered Marion, giving a faint smile under the sense of amusement that some trifle will often furnish in the midst of deep suffering.

"I beg your pardon; I thought that perhaps of your goodness you wished to bestow a crumb of comfort upon me before I went away," said North, with the meekness of great love.

"No, it is nothing of that nature," Miss Lockhart made reply, sinking into the chair that North placed for her. "But I have come to inform you of a fact, because to do so is the only atonement I can make you. And I pray," added she, momentarily lifting her sad eyes to heaven, "I pray that the confession may undo the consequences of my sin. I have nothing else left to hope and pray for."

"What have you to tell me?" demanded North, hoarsely.

But the blow had virtually fallen. North already knew from her countenance and her words, by some sure instinct he felt that Marion Lockhart's mission, be it what it might, was of a nature to separate them wide as the east is from the west.

"I am married; that is what I came to say," said Marion; and as soon as she had spoken, she hid her face in her handkerchief without waiting to see the effect of the communication upon her lover.

"What!" shouted he. "What do you tell me?"

"I am already married," repeated Marion in a broken voice of infinite weariness and sadness.

Talbot North grasped her by the shoulder; he almost shook her in his bewilderment.

"Do you know what you are saying? You tell me that you are *married?*"

"It is the simple truth; I was married some years ago."

"Good heavens! all is indeed over," groaned North.

After that there was a pause. The young man was wrestling with the anguish of his wound in absolute stillness; while Marion only stirred at intervals to wipe the tears that were coursing down her cheeks.

The suspense was becoming intolerable to Marion, and at last she rose to end the interview. But her movement aroused North, who had hitherto remained, his head supported on his arm, motionless against the mantelpiece. She had looked for some harsh speech, words of contempt, hatred; but the face that he now turned towards her was a severer punishment than any reproach his lips could have uttered. She gazed at him in stricken amazement; it seemed as though years of suffering must have passed over his head to have altered his features so greatly.

"Why did I never know this before?" asked he huskily. "Why have you kept it secret?"

"Mine is a very unhappy story," answered Marion with quivering lips. "When I was very young I made a most unfortunate marriage; my husband proved utterly unkind, unworthy; and after a very few months I left him. Wishing to put it out of his power to trace me, I took my second name, that of Lockhart. I have never seen or heard of him since."

"Is my sister aware of these circumstances?"

"She knows nothing," answered Marion, a streak of crimson flashing across the pallor of her cheek. "Sometimes, while Mrs. Montagu has treated me with such confidence and kindness, I have felt myself a kind of impostor. But oftener I forget—perhaps you can hardly believe it—but I *forget* that I have any other name than that of Lockhart. I have been very happy here," she added with a sigh.

"Poor child!" breathed Mr. North, softly.

"Shall you inform Mrs. Montagu of this? Will it be right to do so?" asked Marion a little anxiously, after a pause of silence and of painful reflection on the part of both.

"What sort of a man do you take me to be? No, your secret is safe, so far as I am concerned."

"Have I done very wrong?" inquired Marion again after a brief hesitation.

"We are not able to be judges one of another," answered North, a certain gentleness tempering the gravity of his manner and words. "But you have done harm. Do you not see, child, that your putting yourself in a false position works evil by putting men like myself in a false position also?"

"Will you forgive me?" she asked, timidly. "And will you not forget me?"

"I forgive you; forget you I never can. It must be my lot to love you while life lasts."

"Oh, hush! I am too greatly punished. But it is not true; happiness may yet be in store for you ——"

"Stay!" cried North, interrupting her sternly; "say nothing of that kind. I never breathed the word love to any woman before, and I never shall again. I loved you and must continue now to love you to the end."

V.

"Well! good-bye, and good luck to you! mind you get the appointment," said Mr. Montagu to Talbot the following morning, prior to the departure of the latter for London, whither he was going on business.

"Thanks; but I have changed my mind as to settling in England; I intend to return to India."

As he made the announcement North saw Miss Lockhart start violently, then her eyes met his in one burning gaze in which their very souls met, and the truth was confessed. From that moment North knew that her life was no less wrecked than his own, that the parting was no less grievous to her than to him; and he could not have told whether the knowledge were more bitter or more sweet.

"Nonsense, we shan't let you go abroad again," said his brother-in-law lightly, for he did not attach much consequence to North's remark, treating it as a mere momentary expression of perversity. Only Marion Lockhart understood the serious purpose underlying his words.

"Of course not," said Mrs. Montagu, in echo of her husband. "Well, we shall see you back this day week; you are going no further than London, I suppose?"

"And into Kent," replied North in a somewhat absent tone of voice.

"Kent! what takes you there?" inquired Mrs. Montagu in surprise.

"It is only upon some business of other people's," replied North in a tone that did not invite further questioning. And a few minutes later a servant announced that the dogcart was at the door, and the young man was borne swiftly away.

It was characteristic of Talbot North that he attended in the first place to the business which he had declared to be that of other people. Upon his arrival in London he delayed only to take a hasty luncheon at his hotel and to write one or two letters, and then, driving to Charing Cross, he took rail once more.

As the train drew near to the small village of Rushford, his destination, North pulled a small flat parcel out of the breast-pocket of his coat. Examining the seals to make sure that they were intact, he carefully read the address legibly written on one side of the parcel; and then, replacing it in its former receptacle, fell to considering how he could best discharge the mission with which he was fraught. This was the conveying to a wife the intelligence of the death of her husband. The event had taken place in a foreign land some twelve months before, and North had gathered that a coldness and separation had existed between the wedded pair; but the dews of death were already gathering fast over the sick man's brow when he,

Mr. North, the only European within reach, had been called to the bedside, and, to ease the mind of the dying stranger, had undertaken the charge of seeking out his wife and imparting the intelligence of her loss. At length North was about to discharge the melancholy trust, and for all he knew the news might call forth the bitterest regret and anguish.

Mr. North went straight to the Post Office, as the most likely place in which to discover the address of Mrs. Milman. It was at the same time an emporium for the sale of drapery, and the whole force of the mercantile establishment, as well as the entire body of Her Majesty's officials, drew near to listen to Mr. North's inquiries. No such person as Mrs. Milman was known.

"She was a Miss Wilson," explained North, by way of assisting the memories of these Rushford people.

"Oh! Miss Wilson! She left here years ago; went away when her mother died."

"Do you know of anyone who was intimate with her, who could give me her present address?"

A great shaking of heads attested the general ignorance.

"This is strange," muttered North; "very strange." But the matter had altogether very little interest for him; so, giving up the quest, he took the next train back to town, where he put into the hands of a private inquiry office the business of discovering the lady who had so mysteriously disappeared.

The task was a very small one for those accomplished gentlemen. Upon the morning of the fourth day, as North sat at breakfast in the coffee-room of his hotel, a note was given him containing all necessary particulars. The missing person had been traced, her past employment and history learnt; and her present address was furnished for Mr. North's further purposes in accordance with his request.

The effect of this letter upon North was remarkable: he sprang up from his chair; first, the colour rushed into his face, then as suddenly retreated, leaving his countenance pale and set; and the letter almost dropped from his nerveless fingers, while his eyes fixed themselves upon vacancy. It was fortunate that he happened to be alone in the room.

At last, calling for his bill, North made some pretext of completing his breakfast; but his appetite was gone with his tranquillity, and five minutes later he rose and quitted the hotel.

At three o'clock upon that same afternoon he was walking up the avenue to his sister's house at Freshfield, trying to resolve a difficulty which had just presented itself to his mind—that of accounting to his family for his sudden appearance again in their circle. This was a gordian knot which he utterly failed to undo, but which was cut for him in one moment by the servant who opened the door.

"Master and mistress have gone from home, sir; they will not be

back till some time to-morrow," said that functionary, in some distress over his ill-timed arrival, and quite expecting Mr. North to be overwhelmed with vexation.

On the contrary, Mr. North received the tidings with cheerful resignation, and at once inquired for Miss Lockhart.

"I have sent for you because I have something of importance to communicate," said North to her, as soon as Marion had joined him in the drawing-room.

"Something of importance to communicate!" echoed Marion, with the vague alarm that often seized her. "Will you tell me quickly?"

"Sit down," said North, gently, taking her trembling hand, and leading her to a low easy-chair; then, seating himself nearly opposite to her, he resumed: "I only want now to ask one or two questions. Do you mind telling me your present name?"

She strove to answer, but for a time her quivering lips seemed as though they would refuse their office. At length only a single word was audible.

"Milman."

"That before?—I mean your maiden name."

"Marion Lockhart Wilson."

"Exactly. I only wished to be sure of making no mistake."

The sad eyes of the poor frightened girl asked the question her tongue could not put: his motive in making these inquiries. North lost no time in replying to the glance more pathetic than words.

"I have a trust to fulfil; when I undertook it, I thought I should have been in England much earlier than has actually been the case, otherwise I should have endeavoured to attend to the matter by other means than a personal interview; I must express my regret for my delay. About twelve months ago I was up country, a long distance from Bombay, surveying in a wild and lonely district, when I was fetched one evening to see a sick person, an Englishman. Illness will do its work sharply in that climate; four-and-twenty hours will often see the beginning and the end, and I now found this unfortunate stranger at the point of death."

Mr. North paused; but he saw by Marion's face that the conclusion was half-divined.

"Go on," whispered she, the breath coming and going fast between her parted lips. "That person was?"

"Henry Milman."

North had almost expected her to faint or fall to weeping; but Marion did neither. Her head dropped back against the chair and she closed her eyes for a moment in silent thought or prayer.

"Did he suffer much?" she murmured at length.

"No doubt he had suffered great pain," answered North, ever straightforward and truthful whatever the temptation to the contrary might be. "But by the time I reached him he was fast lapsing into unconsciousness."

"Did he—did he speak at all about—religion?" she asked next, hesitatingly.

"I read him a psalm, and said a prayer at his desire."

"Had he no message to send to me?"

"The power of speech was beginning to leave him when I saw him; he took thought, you perceive, for the news of his death to reach you. He was but just able to give me the necessary names and one or two bare particulars, which I at once took down in writing. In this packet," continued North, placing in her hands a small sealed parcel, "you will find one or two articles, and the precise date of his death, place of burial and so forth. Be assured that everything was as thoroughly attended to as his friends could possibly desire," concluded the young man, without adding that it was of his care and at his expense that all this had been done for the destitute stranger.

She rose from her seat to leave the room. North attended her to the door and, opening it, waited for her to pass through; but before doing so Marion turned round, and her gratitude shining out through her wet eyes, she said simply and softly: "Thank you for your goodness to him, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I suspect your kindness was even more and greater than you have told me."

The next moment Talbot North was alone.

Before there was a chance of Miss Lockhart's being down the next morning, or of Mr. and Mrs. Montagu's return, Talbot North had left again. Mrs. Montagu was in despair at having missed her favourite brother's brief visit.; but a letter which she received from himself a little later brought consolation, for it announced that he had abandoned the idea of returning to India, and was making arrangements for settling in England.

"He must have been offered a splendid appointment to alter his plans so greatly," said Mrs. Montagu, sagely.

And her husband was about to endorse this opinion, when he chanced to catch sight of Miss Lockhart's face, illumined with a tender roseate glow.

"There is the true cause of the change," said he to himself. "We are to have a wedding."

And Mr. Montagu was right both in his conclusions and in his prophecy.

# MAISON MALOUNIE.

## I.

"PRETTY? No; but gentille. Figure to yourself une blonde Mees; and hair, ah! a nymph, undulated, sparkling, golden, magnificent!"

"But not pretty?"

"Well, scarcely perhaps; but a voice! Ah! not a little filet de voix, but a voice like a silver bell—clear, sympathetic."

"Shall I like 'la blonde Mees'?"

"Like her, yes; love her, no: for she has no fortune."

So far I had heard—overheard; let me avow my dishonourable action. But I was "la blonde Mees," and it was too tempting an opportunity! The window was open; I was outside, lazily enjoying a dreamy siesta in the rose bower, when I heard the murmur of voices. My godmother was talking of me; and the deep, pleasant voice asking so many questions about my insignificant self was no other than her august nephew, the son of her only sister, who had married an Englishman—her favourite, Horace Vernon. "No fortune indeed," I repeated, softly, and then, clear as a bell, I struck up the old song:

> "My face is my fortune, sir, she said,
> Sir, she said, sir, she said."

Over and over again, with every variety of intonation, I sang the words. Suddenly I ceased. Instinctively I felt he was nearing the window and meditating a descent in search of the singer. Hastily I fled; fear lent wings to my feet; blindly I made a dash at the clipped yew hedge and its labyrinthine paths, when suddenly I stumbled, and should have fallen but for the arms hospitably outstretched to save me. Recovering myself quickly I drew back with hasty dignity and exclaimed in my best French, "Monsieur!"

He bowed. "Mademoiselle, are you hurt?" he said, managing to infuse much tender solicitude into the few words. Then, with a quick look at me, before I could answer, he added: "Let me introduce myself. I am Horace Vernon; and you must be Miss Eugénie Everard. I have been hearing all about you from my aunt."

I bowed and coloured vividly. "Yes! 'La blonde Mees,'" I could not help retorting, with a smile.

"Ah! you overheard us?" he cried, with a ludicrous expression of dismay.

Anger and the demon of coquetry prompted me there and then to take off my godmother, and I replied in her voice: "Like her, yes; love her, no: for she has no fortune."

The next moment I felt awkward and confused, for I had hardly realized the meaning of the words. Mr. Vernon laughed.

"Well," he said, "I promise."

"Promise what?"

"To like you."

He offered me a well-shaped brown hand, into which, after a moment's hesitation, I put my own. The fingers closed over it in a protecting clasp, and I could not but look up gratefully into the handsome sunburnt face and the merry blue eyes gazing down upon me, as I acknowledged the compact we were making.

Of course my readers will have already decided that I, Eugénie Everard, shall presently fall in love with Mr. Horace Vernon; that he will reciprocate the tender feeling, and thereby break his aunt's heart, and upset all her deeply-laid plans. But the clear-sighted reader does not know that I am turned nineteen and have passed those important years in the gay town of London, where I have left an inconsolable lover. A certain Reverend Robert Duncombe, whose betrothal ring I wear on the othodox finger, and whose photograph I have duly set in a large golden locket, with the touching Greek words A. E. I. on one side, and an impossible monogram of R. D. E. E. in raised filigree work on the other.

Robert is of a saving nature, and has limited our correspondence to three times a week, but he never allows a day to pass without writing, and the budget when it does come is a daily journal of his uneventful life. He wished me to follow the same plan, but I am not of regular habits, and have declined to do more than reply to the folios as I receive them. So much for my side. On the other, there's a certain heiress with a very large dot (millions of francs) destined for Monsieur Horace. Bonne-maman particularly impressed this upon me when she told me she expected her nephew at Dinard. I have not long since arrived from England on a six months' visit to Bonne-maman, otherwise La Comtesse Eugénie Reine Marie d'Harcourt, my mother's old school friend, and my godmother. I was but a baby when I lost both my parents. After my father, Colonel Everard's, death, I lived with my uncle, but misfortune seemed to claim me as her own: my poor aunt died suddenly, and my uncle, broken-hearted, drifted back into an aimless state of bachelorhood. I felt a burden upon him. Eagerly he availed himself of Madame d'Harcourt's invitation to me, and promptly saw me off to Southampton, from whence I was shipped to St. Malo. There I was met by the Countess's man-of-all-work, Jean Pierre, and with him crossed over to Dinard, where Bonne-maman lived in a bright, cheerful white house, with green jalousies, standing in an old-fashioned garden, being near the beach and the lovely bay with its glittering sands of sparkling black granite. Madame d'Harcourt gave me a hearty welcome to Maison Malounie, and Perrine, the comely, black-haired, bright-eyed maid, stared at me approvingly, and admired my travelling garb of English alpaca as much as I did her wonderful lace cuffs, fixed on with gold pins, and her black silk bib apron over her neat stuff gown.

A month had passed rapidly, and I never wavered in my belief in my godmother until this fatal morning, when I experienced the truth of the old adage, and listening, had heard no good of myself. I was nothing, absolutely nothing, to Bonne-maman. All her heart was with the young man who had only just arrived from England, with whom she had been discussing me as a stranger. As if I should ever seek to win the affections of an engaged man! Moreover, am I not myself engaged? Shall I tell her, and make her quite comfortable? No; I resolve I will not do so, but let her feel, if ever so slightly, uneasy.

Yes, as we are both safe, I will make myself as fascinating as I can. Horace Vernon is to marry Mdlle. Berthe de Pontac, and I am to marry the Rev. Robert, so there can be no harm in a little flirtation, and I shall let things take their course.

## II.

THINGS do take their course, and a very pleasant course it is. The days pass quickly, and I have no time to write letters. The Dinard bathing season will soon be at its height. The Parisian world, including Mdlle. Berthe de Pontac, will be here—so Bonne-maman tells me; Horace never mentions her. I often long to ask him about her, but a shy feeling closes my lips. Do I dread that her name should break the spell of happiness cast round my life?

Alas! after some weeks of delightful enjoyment, the spell was broken, and by Bonne-maman.

Horace had fired my imagination by a glowing account of fresh blackberries, the finest, blackest, sweetest that ever were seen. Working upon my enthusiasm, he promised to take me a blackberrying.

The next morning, in high glee, we sallied forth: he armed with a stout hooked stick, I with a basket. Past a cottage, with a bright-eyed maiden tending her pet lamb in the kitchen, while her mother was sitting at the spinning-wheel in the morning sun. Through lanes so narrow, we had to scramble up the steep bank to let the great white horses with the lumbering waggons go by. "Through bush, through briar" we went, and never a blackberry did I see. At last, I ventured to remark upon the singular fact of the flowers and buds being still in full bloom. I heard a slight chuckle, and looking up at my companion's face, saw a mild gleam of fun on it. "Well, you must indeed be a cockney born, to think of expecting blackberries in August." For a moment I was put out, then joining in his merriment I contented myself with the wreath of wild flowers he had gathered.

From this merry excursion we returned in high glee and good humour, my basket laden with flowers, my hat decorated with berries and brightly tinted leaves. Bonne-maman, contrary to her usual hospitality, did not ask Horace to stay, and he went off there and then to his hotel. Then, having removed my protector, I was

treated to a long lecture on my reckless disregard of the proprieties. Were these English manners or rather the want of them? This running about the country with young men for untold hours, this liberty, was unheard of in France, and I must, at least, while under her roof, conform to French usages; unmarried girls could not be too particular.

Conscience stricken, I could find no words of excuse. The hot blood dyed my face, unshed tears made my eyes burn. Stooping, I kissed Bonne-maman in silence, and stepping through the open window into the garden I wandered away out of sight. Yes; I had been unmaidenly, immodest, undignified. Dishonourable, too, forgetting my plighted troth. If only Bonne-maman and Mr. Vernon knew, how they would despise me. Heartsick, I turned away from the garden and sought the solitude of the orchard. There, alone, under the shadowy trees, I could think it out. My eyes ached; my head burned; I was humbled to the dust, to have failed when I felt so sure of myself! Playing with fire, how could I escape? And he—never in words had he confessed his love, but, by a thousand trifles light as air, I felt he loved me. And Berthe? Ah! I thought bitterly, he may like me but he will marry her. Will he love her? I threw myself on the soft cool grass, hiding my face with my hands, and trying to shut out the pain, the sorrow, and the shame, heedless of time and the passing hours.

Suddenly a hand was placed on mine, and I started up. As I did so, my chain caught, the links broke, and my locket fell open at Horace's feet. Before closing and returning it, he said, "May I?" and looking at the portrait, remarked, "Your father's likeness?"

I shook my head, and, pointing to the pearl ring I wore, said bravely: "No! I am engaged."

"Engaged!" His voice was husky. "Then you have been amusing yourself—flirting, to keep your hand in?" And without another word, but with the most hopeless expression I ever saw, he threw the locket down and left me.

I tottered to my feet. I was avenged—he would despise me as a flirt, but he could not accuse me of giving my love unasked, or forcing it upon a man who was not free. If he were engaged, why, so was I. We were quits.

With trembling hands I drew off the fatal ring, and going to my room laid it with the locket and addressed the parcel to the Rev. Robert Duncombe, and straightway wrote and asked for my freedom. I could bear the thrall no more. I must be free. I wrote kindly, feeling dimly the pain I was inflicting; but at all risks I must be free.

## III.

Horace was staying at Dinan. The Baroness de Pontac and her daughter had arrived, and called on Mme. d'Harcourt. Of course, on Horace's return he would be dancing attendance upon his fiancée.

Robert had written. I was too depressed to feel wounded at the tone of his reply, or might have resented his agreeing with me on the desirability of breaking off the engagement. In a postscript he added that he had the promise of the vicarage of Capel-le-Ferne, and its £1,500 a-year; and I came to the conclusion that his joy at his worldly advancement had taken away the sting from his heart's adversity. I was thankful that it was so. The morning was clear and bright, and a swim in the sea was a tempting remedy to drown dull care, so I strolled down leisurely to the beach. I was late, and when I emerged from my "cabane" found a crowd of gossiping idlers in possession of every chair and available seat. Not a nook or corner but was filled with gay couples, working, chattering, smoking, and "frivolling."

Classically draped in my white wrapper, my hair piled up on high, undisfigured with the oilskin cap the French ladies affected, I hurriedly walked through the criticising audience, and leaving my mantle in Perrine's care, was soon disporting myself in the crisp sunny waves. After a longer swim than usual I waded out a dripping Niobe. I looked for Perrine and my wrapper—in vain; she was nowhere to be seen. After a momentary hesitation I prepared to run the gauntlet of the assembled multitude and make a quick rush at my sheltering cabane.

With a sudden inspiration, I unloosed my long hair and let its shining golden glory fall around my costume, thereby trying to feel a little less abject, and so made my way through the "mob," as I spitefully called the loungers surrounding the cabanes. With a ludicrous sense of humiliation and flaming cheeks, I saw Horace in lively conversation with a Parisian elegante, exactly in front of my haven of refuge. I made a frantic dart at the canvas door, to be greeted with the sight of an unmistakable pair of manly boots. I turned and fled—oh! miserie! in my confusion I had forgotten the number. I must pass them, vaguely wondering if beach etiquette expected me to acknowledge Horace. I prepared for another dash—when a lady obligingly pointed out a canvas tent with a polite "c'est là, mademoiselle," and I rushed in to hide my blushes under the friendly canvas. On my return, Bonne-maman told me she expected the Baroness de Pontac and her daughter and Horace.

Although I was broken-hearted, vanity was not dead; I determined to look my best. I gathered my hair in a knot, and placed among the wavy fringe of curls some gorgeous crimson tinnias. I half feared a rebuke from Bonne-maman as to being overdressed—so slipped on a black silk gown, wherein I had artfully inserted a white lace tucker and shiny jet-embroidered ruffles; another cluster of scarlet tinnias and black mittens finished off the severe and becoming costume, in which I entered the room prepared to make the acquaintance of the hateful de Pontacs.

Mdlle. Berthe only was there, arrayed in fashionable attire, and I

was scarcely surprised to recognise in her Horace's lively companion of the morning. Horace behaved beautifully in Bonne-maman's eyes. After greeting me coldly, he overlooked my insignificant presence, lost in the overpowering brilliancy of the sparkling and amusing Berthe. She absorbed him entirely. They were making arrangements for a trip to Mont St. Michel, where he and I had talked of going. How wretched I felt, how wild with the scraps I heard: "Train from St. Malo—carriage at Dol, on to the Hospice." I must make a diversion, and somewhat abruptly asked Mdlle. de Pontac to play or sing. In vain Bonne-maman objected that it was getting dusk and she did not want lights, as it rested her eyes. Mdlle. Berthe, gracefully shaking out her puffs and laces, sweetly observed she would play for Mme. d'Harcourt, and sing for Mademoiselle.

She rattled through a noisy and brilliant piece, and then her voice, sharp and metallic, filled the air: "Si vous n'avez rien à me dire." She was singing it at Horace, who, apparently buried in thought, was sitting near her. I wondered if he remembered it as one of the songs I had often sung to him. Bonne-maman coughed and fidgeted and shivered; Mdlle. Berthe bravely sang on, sometimes flat, sometimes sharp, finishing at last on a note that jarred every nerve and fibre.

Horace was profuse in thanks, and I, too, thanked her, and added immediately, "Shall I sing you a little English ballad?" Bonne-maman interrupted me to order the lamp, but I maliciously remarked that I would sing a twilight song first. I could not resist my anticipated triumph. Straight from my heart the words rang out, "In the Gloaming," and vibrating strangely through the dusk came the farewell to my love, mine no longer—"Best for you and best for me."

I must have sung better than usual, from the deep silence paid as tribute to my talent, and under cover of the darkness I rose, and stealing silently to the door, sought the friendly night wherein to hide my sorrow. Perrine met me with the lamp, and leaving the hateful light and the happy circle I turned away to the garden.

## IV.

Hurriedly I went, past the clipped yew hedge, to the stone seat, on which I sank, and burying my face in my hands burst into passionate tears. I was young, and this my first sorrow seemed too great a burthen. I heard footsteps, and shrinking back into the shadow of the hedge, waited breathlessly. They were passing, when the treacherous moon shone out and bathed me in a flood of silvery light. A hand was kindly laid upon my head. There, in all the glory of his six-foot stature, in the white shining moonlight, stood Horace, looking down with kind and pitying eyes upon the tear-stained face uplifted to him; and in the winning voice of old I heard my name.

"Eugénie, what is it?"

"Nothing," I murmured.

He bent to hear my trembling answer.

"Nothing that I can do?"

"Nothing that I can undo," I replied.

Lower and lower he bent, and nearer and nearer, in dangerous proximity, had it not been for Berthe. Her shadow was between us. Tenderly taking my cold hands in his, he stroked them gently. Suddenly he gave a start.

"Where is it?" and he passed his fingers lightly over mine.

"It?" I inquired.

"Your ring. You should wear it always, or a fellow may be tempted to forget himself."

"And you," I replied; "you, too, should wear a ring. French husbands often do, and you should do in Rome as the Romans do."

"But I am only half French," he laughed, "and I might marry an English girl; then I need not wear a ring."

"Berthe de Pontac is very French," I returned.

"Mdlle. de Pontac! Eugénie, I am too proud to marry a woman with money."

"And too poor to marry one without," I sadly retorted.

The words slipped out, and before I could cough them down I was in his arms and smothered with kisses. Ere I could realise my happiness a discreet cough sounded from the path, and we started apart to see Perrine slowly advancing.

"How touching of her to warn us," said Horace. "A fellow feeling makes us wondrous kind; she's setting her cap at Pierre."

"Her cap!" I laughed merrily; "and such a cap!"

Monsieur was wanted to escort Mdlle. Berthe, and Madame wanted Mademoiselle.

I could not see Bonne-maman. I trembled guiltily at the thought. With a whispered "Till to-morrow," we parted—Horace to convoy Mdlle. Berthe to her lordly château, I through the kitchen to my bower. I hastily undressed and sought my couch. Half an hour later, when Bonne-maman softly entered on tip-toe, I pretended to be asleep. Even then I feared she must read my secret on my face. She turned away with a little sigh, and I felt a terrible humbug. My intense happiness frightened me, and in vain I tried to sleep. At last, towards morning, I fell into a doze, from which I awoke with a feeling of coming evil.

## V.

The feeling was verified. The next morning Bonne-maman was too ill to rise. I sat near her, and after a while she murmured in a feeble voice, "Eugénie, my child, I should like you to stay with me; always, if your uncle will not object. When Horace is married

I shall be very lonely. Will you stay, dear, until you, too, marry and leave the old woman?"

The blood flamed in my cheeks; I stooped and kissed her fondly.

"I will not leave you, Bonne-maman, unless—unless you send me away."

While I was speaking, the doctor came. Alas, my dread forebodings were realized! Bonne-maman was indeed ill, stricken with typhus fever.

And so my dream ended. I looked my last upon Horace. He was obliged to leave for England, and the doctor was to telegraph him bulletins of Madame d'Harcourt's health. In vain he urged me to let the sister-of-charity take my place beside her. I was firm. A duty was before me—clear and distinct: I was needed by the kind old lady who had befriended me and offered me a home. True to the old friend, if it must be, I must risk losing the young friend, the more than friend. I do not deny that it was a struggle between duty and inclination, but she needed me, and he—well, "he loved and he rode away."

Days grew into weeks, weeks lengthened into months; Bonne-maman varied, now better, now worse. At last my patience was crowned with success, my love won her back from the arms of death.

She owed her life to my nursing. The yellow flag was still flying, and we were not out of quarantine, when Perrine, with her face shining like a beneficent sunbeam, importantly announced "a visit."

It was a bright spring morning, and as the visitor was in the sitting-room, I decided upon holding a parley from the garden, thus averting any danger of lingering infection. Throwing a scarf round my head, I stood before the closed window and tapped lightly; instantly it flew open and I was clasped in the arms of my stalwart lover.

He laughed my fear of infection to scorn, suggested a warm climate for Bonne-maman, a month or two at Cannes—and as I also needed a thorough rest, he proposed changing Miss Eugénie Everard into Mrs. Horace Vernon.

I think Perrine must have put Bonne-maman up to a thing or two. She was not surprised to hear the news, and I was considerably relieved to find her own. "She was glad her one darling was to marry her other darling."

## A STORY FROM CABUL.

Just a handful of Sikhs, and an Englishman at their head:
  But the enemy swarmed by scores, an endless, pitiless mass,
So "Draw swords and charge!" the very last words he said,
  And the handful, a handful less, broke down the mountain pass.

His troopers held him up, with a bullet hole in his breast,
  And they laid him under a rock; there was no time to spare—
Into Sherpore by gunfire, that was the chance for the rest,
  To ride for fifteen miles with the enemy's shot in the air!

Scarcely more than a boy, they laid him dead on the rock:
  Never a kiss, nor a holy word, nor a tear to hallow the place,
For the foe were rallying behind from the sudden shock;
  Only they crossed his arms on his breast, and covered his face.

But the grey horse he had ridden stood close at the master's side—
  Bridle, nor spur, nor word of command, he heeded them not.
Into Sherpore by gunfire, and fifteen miles to ride;
  So they were bound to press on, and leave him guarding the spot.

Into Sherpore by gunfire: they did it, the brave little band,
  And told the sorrowful tale of the charge that the Captain led.
Had we laid him to rest in the stateliest church of his land,
  We had not mourned more deeply, more truly, our friend that was dead.

That was a night of alarms; the enemy showed in force,
  So we doubled our guard at the gates and waited the first attack,
And just before morning, sounded the nearing steps of a horse.
  "Who comes there?" cried the sentry, and got no answer back.

"Click!" went the carbine, "Fire!" and the steps were still:
  Silently something fell in the dark, with the fall that is dead,
And when the morning light struggled over the crest of the hill,
  There lay the Captain's grey charger, "Favorite," shot through the head.

Was it lone on the hillside, and did he seek our aid?
  How can we tell what stirrings of love were strong in the beast?
He had fed from the master's hand; and it seemed that his grief essayed,
  In this dim, dumb way, to bring us the last sad news, at least.

He who fired the shot had often groomed him and fed—
  One of the Captain's troop: an ignorant fellow, of course;
So he primed the carbine again, and put the charge thro' his head.
  Strange, how the stirrings of love worked both in man and horse!

G. B. Stuart.

ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"IT'S NO FIT TASK FOR A POOR OLD BODY LIKE ME," SAID CHARITY.

THE ARGOSY.

*APRIL, 1882.*

# MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE SECRET IN THE CHIMNEY.

THE shades of evening were gathering fast. Mrs. Raven, hastening along under them, gained her home as fast as her trembling limbs would permit. She was thankful that none of the servants were about the avenue now; the older ones had retired to their sitting-room for rest and gossip, the younger ones were keeping lovers' trysts in the secluded glades of the park. Though the twilight outside was still golden with the last of the sunlight, the lamps were already burning in the hall, and its doors, and those of rooms opening upon it, stood wide open, in all the sweet gracious security of a pleasant English mansion. Mrs. Raven's now half-crouching figure, with its irregular steps and outstretched, groping hand, fell upon the peaceful picture like a blot.

She went straight to her own room and shut and locked the door, which was something that, surrounded by her well-trained, ceremonious servants, she had never done before. Throwing off her bonnet, she turned to her little étagère where her key-basket usually stood. It was there, but empty. Bewildered by this, she reflected for a moment, and then remembered that being alone, and keeping her own room through the day, she had never changed her dress. She still wore the black merino which was usually discarded for silk and crape before dinner. In the morning, she had slipped the bunch of keys into the pocket of this dress, and there they were still.

The words of the strange woman had seemed to indicate that some mysterious message, or warning, would be found written on one of the sheets of note paper ("the *top* paper") which Mrs. Raven had herself put over her laces in the drawer that same morning. If so, then it must have been there when she put it. The costly Bramah locks could not have been tampered with.

She scarcely realised what it could mean, or what she was to find. Perhaps nothing. There might be nothing to find. Of one thing she felt almost sure—that she had not put two papers into any of the drawers. The whole thing, despite the marvellous circumstantiality of the directions, might be a take-in; or a lucky guess, founded upon some accidentally overheard gossip that Mrs. Raven possessed such drawers.

With cold and hurrying fingers she fitted the key into the second drawer. Yes, sure enough there were two sheets of paper. She now remembered them directly. During her morning re-arrangement she had added the upper paper in this one instance that she might fold it in at the back of the drawer to guard from any dust a roll of white lace especially delicate. She drew the sheet of paper out and stood with it in her hand. The wax candles were alight in the heavy candelabra on her mantelshelf. But she was in no hurry now. Rather she craved a moment's respite.

Did she hear steps in the corridor, or was it her fancy? Her maid would be coming presently to take her evening instructions. She had locked her door to secure privacy, but she wished to get it open again, if possible, before anyone came to invade that privacy.

Crossing the room, and standing in front of the candle, she held up the paper close to its flame, about on a level with her own eyes.

Yes—something was growing visible! She held it closer to the candle—closer—closer. The writing was blue. Now it was quite clear: she could read it!

"If your son sends away Eldred Sloam, Evelyn Agate shall never come to Ravenscourt."

That was all. And in her high-pitched excitement she had thrust the paper so near the light, that as she read the words upon it, it caught fire in its very centre, and she was forced to drop it into the fender. She went down on her knees and tried to blow out the fire before all was reduced to ashes. She rushed to her washhandstand for the water-bottle. But it was too late. There was only a little heap of charred papers. And even those, in her guilty terror, she gathered into her hand, and thrust them up the chimney, out of sight.

What was it? Who was it? Who was it, inhabiting Ravenscourt, that was able to penetrate the secrets hidden within her own bosom? What should she do? Where could she go? She could not bear to remain in the familiar room, whose very furniture seemed now to be suddenly endowed with conscious life, hostile to her. She crept away to the little inner chamber where she had slept since the Squire's death, and lay down on her bed, with her face buried in the pillow.

Who could know anything about Evelyn Agate? Was it possible, she mused in her terror, that she was being made the victim of some vile conspiracy, to which that young girl herself was a party? The next moment she felt ashamed of the thought. She remembered that

while she knew all about Evelyn, Evelyn knew nothing about her—not even of her existence. Unless Frank had chanced to see her through the medium of Philip Connell, and had made some vague mention of his mother.

Frank's mother! And to think that Evelyn had never heard of her, unless it might be by that name! Mrs. Raven moaned as she lay in the darkness.

But—what possible connection could there be between Evelyn Agate and the peasant Eldred Sloam, that this threat should be held out to her? The man rose up before her sight now, with his fine figure, his well-formed, bold face, and his half-genial, half-insolent manner. She knew all the gossip connected with this man, all the scandal of the by-gone days.

Mrs. Raven had heard nothing of Eldred Sloam's suggested departure. If such a step were in contemplation, it must be the result of some sudden decision of her son's. How had other people heard of it? Apart from any self-interest, Mrs. Raven did not like the step. It had pleased her husband's trustees, and her husband later, to continue the benefits to the man that the old Squire had begun; they had lasted so many years now that he might be excused for thinking he had a sort of right to remain on the estate. It was unwise of Leonard to put old institutions at defiance, and it was unkind. Could it have been this movement of Leonard's, which rumour might have carried to the gipsy woman's ear, that suggested the warning rhyme, spoken by her at the Pitchfork.

The more Mrs. Raven thought of this possible action of Leonard's, the less she liked it. In what way it could affect herself in her private interest, she saw not, but she felt strangely uneasy. Would it be in her power to turn Leonard from his will—and when she dared give him no reason for personally wishing it? Anyway, she must try to do so.

But all this was beside the question. The invisible writing on the sheet of paper—how did it come there? It was she herself who had sent Charity Hale to fetch the paper from her desk downstairs in the morning, giving her the key to unlock the drawer where it had been kept since black-edged paper had been substituted for dainty monograms. She remembered that Charity had been quick on her errand, for she had thought at the time, how active the old woman was still. Surely Charity could not have had anything to do with it!

Just at the very moment when she had resolved to act as if everything was as simple and straightforward as it appeared on the surface, she found herself caught by some inexplicable power, which seemed to detect her unspoken motives, and to use them as a means of compassing its own secret ends. Who was this strange woman—and was she this inexplicable power in her own person, or only its agent? And what had she to do with Evelyn? Anything?

How came the deserted child, Evelyn, to have found its way to

the Agates' house? And as that name passed through her thoughts, a blush, almost a girlish blush, burned on her cheek. Again, if all her suspicions were true (and now they seemed to her to be no longer jealous fears but menacing facts, though she resolved to die rather than breathe them again), whence did Frank derive what Leonard truly called "the Raven face."

But the manner of the writing's appearance affected Mrs. Raven's nerves scarcely more than its disappearance, which yet she knew well enough to be due to nothing but her own excited eagerness. She now began to feel as if what she saw had been but the hallucination of her own heated brain. She slipped off the bed, went softly back to her boudoir, and put her hand up the chimney. Yes, there was the charred paper. At least, she had not imagined the incident: why, therefore, should she think she had imagined the words? How had they come on the paper, and who had written them? And, in sheer lack of any other outlet for suspicion, she turned it again on Charity.

There was soot on her white hands: and while she was washing it off with hasty disgust, a knock came to the door. She cried, "Come in," and only remembered it was locked when she heard the handle fruitlessly turned: and she unlocked it hastily. It was only Janet Mackay come about her usual duties. Mrs. Raven went back to her bed, and lay down. She felt alone in the whole world, nay, in the whole universe; and she cowered into the darkness as if in hopes there to be alone, even from herself.

"I'm afraid you are not well, ma'am," said the Scotch maid, kindly.

"I think I am not, Janet," she answered: "at any rate, I feel very faint and tired. I think I will go to bed." And as she rose languidly to undress, she inquired whether Mr. Raven had returned.

"No, ma'am," answered Janet. "Budd does not expect him yet."

"Will you tell Mr. Raven I wish to speak with him here when he comes in, Janet. I wish to speak with him particularly," she added. "Did you get through your work this morning?"

Now, Janet's work that morning had been the sewing of fresh lace on sundry occasional tables and brackets in the drawing-rooms. Janet answered that she had quite finished it.

"Do you remember if Charity fetched anything from the drawing-room while you were there?" asked her mistress.

Janet reflected. It is not easy to recall, at a moment's notice, the comings and goings of those who come and go about us every day. But Janet's memory served her.

"Yes, ma'am," she said; "Charity went to the cabinet in the back drawing-room, and took away some paper."

"Was she long in doing it?"

"Just half a minute, ma'am, as it seemed to me."

"That is all right," said Mrs. Raven evasively, feeling terribly that it (or that something) was all wrong.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Janet, holding up the garment her mistress had taken off, "there seems a smell of soot about this dress! Ah, here it is, all over the white cuff! How can it have got there? Could I have flicked the sleeve into the grate as I shook it?"

"Oh, never mind," cried Mrs. Raven, dropping into a chair, and feeling as if a volume of cold water was engulfing her. "Never mind that, Janet. Help me to bed, and bring me a glass of wine."

"Don't you think a drop of brandy might be better, ma'am?" said the servant, compassionately. "It will revive you best."

"Anything you like," said Mrs. Raven, "only bring it—and leave me—and don't let me be disturbed till my son comes home."

The maid obeyed in alarmed silence. She brought as large a glass of brandy as she thought it reasonable for a lady to drink, especially one so abstemious as Mrs. Raven. Her mistress swallowed it at a mouthful, and lay down with her face to the wall.

Janet Mackay shaded the candles, closed the door softly, and went back to her fellow servants. "The mistress was poorly the night," she said, in the quaint idiom which she had kept through many years of English residence.

"Maybe she walked too far this evening?" suggested Sims.

"She seems worried," said Janet; "and a bit put about, as if she'd lost something, maybe. She wants the Squire to go to her directly he comes in. She asked whether you had been moving anything in the drawing-room to-day, Charity; and whether you were long about it."

"She did, did she?" retorted Charity, in a tone of defiance. And the next minute she got up and went away.

James Sloam chanced to be present. He had some dim idea of a relationship between the old woman and himself. At any rate, she had been kind to him in his neglected childhood. But she kept him down, and he did not care to speak much before her. As soon as she closed the door his tongue was at liberty.

"The mistress took her walk to the Pitchfork this evening," he began to the others. "She went to tell them they ought not to keep the likes of that clear-voyer on respectable licensed premises. Old Worsfold got into a rare fright when he saw her come up ——"

"How do you know this, James?" interrupted Mrs. Sims.

"Giles told me, ma'am; I saw him just now in the lane. And it was very awkward, he says; for while Mrs. Raven stood trimming Worsfold and his wife about harbouring the woman, she came down right upon 'em. There was a bit of a shindy among 'em, and the mistress here she walked away with her head up; and the clear-voyer, taking the change out of her gold piece, and wishing 'em a good day, followed after her. She put herself right in her path, and stood staring her in the face, and then whispered something to her and gave her head a nod, and went off by way of the cross roads. Giles was peeping round the corner of the milking-shed, and he saw Mrs.

Raven's face go ghastly white, and her lips begin to tremble. I think that must be an awful woman."

"Why, what could she have said to the mistress!" exclaimed Janet Mackay, breaking the silence which the news had caused. "That is what must have turned her queer."

"Ah, the gentry pretend not to believe in these things," commented Sims; "but they do believe in 'em when they are brought near."

Charity Hale came back to her seat. Nobody paid any heed to her, or they might have noticed the slightly tighter pursing of her thin lips, which in Charity was always a sign of triumph.

Charity had been upstairs to pay Mrs. Raven a visit. She had found the boudoir lights dimly burning, the door communicating with the bed-room open, and the bed-room in semi-darkness.

"I'm afraid you're ill, madam," she said, standing in the doorway. "Janet seemed to think you were worried, looking for something you could not find. Might I be able to help you?"

"No, no; it is nothing, Charity," said Mrs. Raven faintly.

"I hope I haven't put anything wrong," observed Charity. "Janet said you were asking if I'd been in the drawing-room to-day. I only went there when you told me, madam, to get that paper for the drawers. I had to open a new packet of that paper—I hope I wasn't wrong in that?"

"Oh, no, Charity, quite right," said Mrs. Raven. "I only fancied —well—I mean I only thought something had got out of its place."

"Eh! I do hate things getting lost," said Charity. "It makes one feel as if there was a thief about the house. And if there's a thief to the fore, steal he will, though it be things of no value to any but their owner."

Charity's tone was civil—nay, almost abject. But Mrs. Raven writhed on her couch in the dark.

"Charity," she cried, "why should you grow suspicious over every trifle? Nothing has been lost. I am very ill and sorrowful, Charity. I do not wish to conceal that from you—I couldn't, perhaps, if I would; but you must not think I am blaming you, or anybody else. One may feel sad and distressed sometimes, almost causelessly."

"I'm afraid your walk this evening was too much for you, madam," said the old woman, in quite another tone.

"Perhaps it was," sighed Mrs. Raven, catching at the excuse.

"I'm sorry if I've disturbed you, madam. I've scarcely ever heard you so faint-like. There's something in your voice that 'minds me of the time after Master Frank was born, and I nursed ye, and ye were too sick-like to even take any pride in the baby. You and old Charity have been through a good deal together.——Well, good-night, madam," added Charity, after a lengthened silence. "I hope you'll sleep well, and be better in the morning."

Mrs. Raven was still lying as Charity had left her, when Leonard,

in obedience to the request conveyed to him, came up. Like most sickly people, he shrank from the presence of pain or suffering of any kind; almost resenting it.

"Well, mother," was his greeting, "what is the matter? What do you want me for? I hope you are not ill." Like Charity, he did not advance into the darkened room, but paused at the door.

"Come in, Leonard," said his mother, in a weak, muffled voice. "Come in, and sit here beside me."

He obeyed ungraciously, sitting down on a chair about a yard from the couch; but he stretched out no caressing finger towards the poor hands writhing within his reach. He had inherited his mother's cold nature, and been bred in his mother's ways. He was her other self, and now she found there was no comfort in him.

"Any news?" she asked.

"News—no," he answered. "And you are better without news, mother, if you are ill. It is no news, I'm sure, that I find everything everywhere in a dreadfully loose and neglected condition. But I'll soon put matters straight enough."

"Leonard," she said, "do not be too hasty. Do not be too severe on the poor people for ways which your father's easy habits led them into."

"They must all go," he said, hardly. "It is bad enough to have patience with the result of old-fashioned farming, without bothering oneself with old-fashioned labourers into the bargain. To-morrow I discharge the first on the list—though he can hardly be called a labourer—that Eldred Sloam."

Mrs. Raven half raised herself. "Eldred Sloam has been long on the land, Leonard."

"Too long."

"Have you mentioned to anybody your intention to dismiss him?" she resumed, eagerly seeking for a clue which might lead her to the source of her mysterious warning.

"No,—why do you ask?" returned Leonard, getting surprised.

"Are you quite sure you have not mentioned it to anybody?" she urged. "I want you to think before you answer me."

"I am quite sure I have not mentioned it to—stay," broke off Leonard—"I remember now. I did mention it to Mr. Toynbee on Saturday, when he was taking lunch here."

"Do you think he has mentioned it again?"

"I think not—for certain. As he does not, I fancy, altogether approve of some of my contemplated changes, he would be little likely to talk of them. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, for nothing," she answered, carelessly. "Leonard, I am going to crave a favour of you. Do not send Eldred Sloam away."

"Well, really, mother: this is too absurd," cried Leonard, not angrily, not even harshly, but much as he might have answered a

child who preferred a troublesome and unreasonable request. "You are getting some other strange fancy into your head in place of the one your London journey drove out of it."

"I don't often ask anything of you, Leonard," she wailed, "but let this man stay. Your father let him stay. You—you of course know who this man is said to be, Leonard: that he has Raven blood in his veins."

"Shall I give you my opinion, mother—that he never ought to have been tolerated on the estate at all. When shameful things happen they should be hidden away out of sight."

"You are right. But it was not done. Here the man has been, and here he is; and it will be cruel to uproot him. Ill character though he may be, he is to be pitied. He is not a Raven, of course; but ——"

"I should think not," scornfully spoke Leonard. "Not a Raven! You are not carrying your changeling theories back for a generation or two, I should hope, mother."

"Leonard," said his mother, with sudden dignity, "you blamed me for having allowed one fancy to grow to gigantic proportions in secrecy and silence. Do not, therefore, blame me for speaking now. Call this a fancy if you will, but the instinctive feeling against it lies too strongly within me to be flung aside. If you will not listen to my prayer, you must to my command—forgive me for presuming, Leonard. I desire that Eldred Sloam should remain where your father left him."

"Well, I won't speak to him to-morrow, at any rate," Leonard answered, with that sort of indulgent indifference with which nurses assent to the ravings of delirium. "Will that satisfy you? I can't promise more than that. He shall stay on for the present."

"And you will not dismiss him even later on, without giving me due warning?" she eagerly urged.

"Very well, mother, I will also promise that."

"Thank you, Leonard," she said, her tone trembling with emotion, "thank you very heartily. Even if you think you err, you will not regret erring for once on the side of mercy at your mother's request."

Leonard wished her good-night, and went away wondering. "It is indeed high time she got a companion," he mused. "I begin to think my father's death gave her a greater shock than I thought. Seems to me that her brain must be giving way!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MARY DAVIES'S ACCIDENT.

FRANK RAVEN dragged on his weary weeks in London. Philip Connell could not understand him at all. Philip's own plan of life was to work by night and trifle about through the day, earning by

various spasmodic sorts of literary labours, not enough to pay his way, but enough to maintain a certain credit, and so keep his debts steadily on the increase. That an end must come to such ways of life, Philip would have admitted, if pressed, but, as he said one day, "There's no need to look round the corner for trouble."

"No," Frank rejoined, "not if you take care to walk in the opposite direction."

"It is no use brooding," Philip would say, "and in your case it is folly to do it. There might be some excuse for me, if I did it. It would be a stiff pull on the governor if he had to pay my debts, as he would do if he knew of them; though I keep that dark, and my duns never dream of it. But you—you are a rich man, Frank. Not to say that the old lady ——"

"My mother," interrupted Frank.

"Not to say that your mother would certainly do the handsome thing for you at once, if you managed well," Philip went on, heedless of any rebuking spirit in Frank, "but you might help yourself by borrowing on the fortune which must be yours some day."

"At my mother's death," said Frank again, with a quivering lip.

"Well, everybody must die," observed Philip, with philosophy, "and our parents go before ourselves in the order of nature."

"Philip," said Frank, with simple earnestness, "I am not a rich man: I would rather not touch one farthing from home, if I can do without it. But I shall not borrow money on my expectations. I must get work of some sort, and that soon. I don't expect I'm up to much: but surely I can do a little and eke out my hundred pounds. And I can't go on living with you always; at least, not without sharing expenses."

Philip respected his distress, and not for worlds would he have hinted that Frank was benefitting, just now, not by money out of his own pocket, but by a steady increase of that wonderful mountain of debt which must certainly descend in an avalanche some day.

One morning further on, the letter for which Frank had vaguely watched lay before him. Its thick vellum envelope, deep black edge and heavy seal, made it conspicuous among the little light notes and blue missives addressed to his cousin.

Mrs. Raven had written what was, for her, quite a long letter. Two sheets of note-paper were covered by her large, flowing handwriting. And yet she seemed to have very little to say, and Frank scarcely knew whether he was gratified or disappointed.

"My dear Boy,—I am longing to know when your London visit comes to an end. Ravenscourt has seemed very empty this harvest time with your dear father gone and you away. But I must not selfishly call you from pleasures and interests suitable to your age, and from the agreeable society of our kind nephew, Philip Connell. Only I shall be glad to see you when you care to come. My loneliness has been great, and I have resolved to engage a companion. I

advertised in some of the London papers, and have had many answers. One of them I fancied more than the rest, and have been in correspondence with the young lady. I think she will suit me: but as it is necessary that any permanent arrangement should be based upon a personal liking on both sides, I have invited her to pay me a trial visit. If we suit each other, her presence here will save you from any dutiful compunctions on the score of absence, and may make your home-comings more cheery. I am told she is a good musician. I don't think there is any other news from Raven, but of course I could not think of making such a change as this in the house without letting you know of it at once. My compliments to Philip, and I am, my dear boy,

"YOUR AFFECTIONATE MOTHER."

"I think my mother likes me better while I am away than when I am present," said Frank within himself, but he made no such reflection aloud. To Philip he only said that his mother was on the eve of engaging a young lady as companion.

"What a pity Mrs. Raven did not tell us this beforehand; we might have recommended Evelyn Agate," remarked Philip, as he opened his own letters. "I suppose she has done it in a hurry."

"In a hurry, at last," said Frank. "But I think she must have spoken about it for some time; old Charity mentioned something of the sort to me before I left home."

"Whew!" whistled Philip, scanning one of his notes. "What do you think this is, Frank? A letter from Miss Agate, inviting us to go to her place this evening to say good-bye to Evelyn, who is off to Ravenscourt to pay a visit to its mistress, with a view to becoming her companion."

"What an extraordinary thing!" exclaimed Frank.

Philip nodded, and continued reading from Miss Agate's letter: "From the coincidence of names and places, we cannot help thinking the lady must be either actually your friend's mother, or else some connection of the family at present resident in his home. Ask him to come with you. It makes it easier for me to let Evelyn go. She is bearing the thought of this change in life very bravely."

"You little humbug!" Philip apostrophized, alluding to Evelyn. "Does she humbug herself into that belief, or only think she humbugs you?—Evelyn 'bearing bravely,'—what has she to bear, dear imaginative Miss Agate? Any day she would change you and your big brain and warm heart, for a diamond bracelet or a purse of money. And she has a better chance of picking up those where she's going than where she is."

Frank laughed.

"Ah," commented Philip. "She will ask you some sly little questions to-night about your brother, Frank. Mark my words if she doesn't. She asked me about *you* the other night, and I told her you were entirely dependent on your mother, and stopped short of

even saying 'while she lived.' For she's a long-sighted one, is Miss Evelyn, and you are rather green! Shall you like her for a sister-in-law?"

"Don't be silly, Philip."

"*I* should not care for her even for a cousin-in-law, I can tell you that. And I tell you now, Frank, that you may not cry out sour grapes upon me when she becomes Lady of Ravenscourt."

"Oh!" said Frank. "I thought you seemed to admire her very much: I overheard you paying her all sorts of compliments."

"Well," answered Philip, carelessly, "when you have to draw the bow in order to be civil at all, you may as well draw it pretty wide."

They started for Miss Agate's in the evening. It was the third time Frank had been there. The incongruousness of the surroundings which had so mystified him at first, had worn off. He knew now who and what he was going to see; and he looked at the crowded squalid streets, and the bare old houses, understanding how Gertrude Agate saw them and loved them and lived among them. This was not the sort of woman one finds in the conventional mansion with a back and front drawing-room and a butler's pantry. Special natures have their habitats, quite as distinctly as flowers.

There had been some preparation for their coming, for the parlour curtains—of some richly tinted stuff, though rather worn and faded—were drawn, and faintly illumined by a lamp burning within. The servant, Mary Davies, showed them into the presence of the two ladies. A pretty tea-service was already set, and though Miss Agate was her old self in her clinging black dress and plain frills, Evelyn had blossomed from her heavy velveteen into a creamy cashmere, set off with an olive green ribbon, which was also twined in her rich chestnut hair.

She left her hand in Frank's for a moment as he greeted her. "Is it not strange that I should be going to your people?" was all she said, and there was a sort of confiding appeal in her voice which might have touched the youth's sympathy but for his conviction that Philip, just behind him, was laughing in his sleeve.

"Yes, it is strange," interposed Gertrude, "and only proves what I always say, that the world is but a small place. And this seems to have happened so opportunely—as if it were purposed. The very same day that Evelyn was expecting her advertisement to appear, she took up the newspaper and saw one in it, a very nice one, from a lady wanting a companion, and she wrote at once. Now that I see you here, Mr. Raven, Evelyn's going to your mother makes me feel that she will be among friends."

"I have made up my mind to make friends wherever I go," cried Evelyn.

"Please to remember that Mrs. Raven is my aunt as well as Frank's mother," remarked Philip. "Does not that recommend her equally well? I believe nobody ever recollects that I am related to anybody but myself."

"Oh, to be sure—certainly," cried Evelyn. "Then how does the relationship come in? Mrs. Raven must be ——"

"Mrs. Raven is the widow of my mother's brother," explained Philip.

"Mr. Connell," said Miss Agate, "you are quite right in saying that nobody—nobody, at least, as far as I am concerned—ever thinks of you in relation to your family."

"Oh, there are so many of us," answered Philip lightly. "We have to stretch out our affection to make it go round. There are four at home, three girls and one boy, and there are six away: two girls married, I in London, Jack in Demerara, Sidney in Halifax, and William somewhere on the high seas. We can't all write each other a weekly letter, and if one is honoured by it, the rest are jealous, so we are all impartially silent. I go home two or three times a year, and when I'm coming away I say to the mater, 'Remember, no news is good news: you'll hear directly anything goes wrong.' It would be awful for her to be always expecting six letters: she would never get through the stocking basket."

"That is the sensible way to look at matters," assented Evelyn, pouring out the tea. "Of what use are letters? When I was away at school I had often to give up a walk, or some such enjoyment, for the sake of the weekly letter that Gertrude insisted on. Don't you agree with me, Mr. Raven?"

"No, I don't," said Frank bluntly. "I wish I had somebody that I felt sure would care for a weekly letter from me."

"I am with you, Mr. Raven," said Miss Agate; "I am with you entirely."

"Well, I don't know," contended Evelyn. "I think a great deal of love is only a nuisance altogether. There is Mary Davies now, with *her* love—just because she nursed me! She has developed a new form of distress. Formerly she wept that I should go away at all. Now she weeps that I am going to Ravenstoke, and assures me the place is bad."

"What does she know about Ravenstoke?" asked Frank, rather piqued to hear any aspersion cast on his beloved village.

"Of course she knows nothing," answered Evelyn: "wherever I had been going it would have been the same. She's an Alstock woman, and she says she has been in Ravenstoke (which is very likely—the places are not more than twelve miles apart, I believe), and that the Ravenstoke people are bad people. As she may possibly have found them, classing with the hedgers and ditchers."

"I think all the Raven people are fairly respectable," spoke Frank, inclined to stand up for the humblest peasant in the place. "There must be a few worthless characters, as there are everywhere, but they are so well looked after, that they don't do much harm. The most disreputable man in it is——but never mind," broke off Frank.

"Nay, let us hear the disreputable man's name?" cried Evelyn.

"Perhaps he may be one of Davies's old acquaintances. It will be fun to tell her we know the name of her respectable friend."

Frank felt as if he hated the smooth, bright girl, with her sweet, hard voice, and her heartless words.

"The man's name is Eldred Sloam," he said coldly. "He is in our employment, when he chooses to do any work, and lives on the estate. I should not wonder, though, if Leonard were to turn him off: he does not like him. Mr. Toynbee ——"

"Who is Mr. Toynbee?" interrupted Evelyn.

"Mr. Toynbee is the vicar," Frank answered; and there he cut the conversation short by turning to Miss Agate, and beginning upon a very different subject.

Evelyn gave her head a slight toss; it did not escape the quick eye of Philip Connell, and he prepared to devote himself to her entertainment. Perhaps he liked her less than Frank did: certainly he could better have given reasons for his dislike. But he liked amusing himself, and he liked studying human nature. Philip Connell had once kept tame snakes in his chambers, and had written several magazine articles about them.

"Was Frank giving you an account of the beauties of Ravenstoke, and the virtues of its inhabitants?" he asked, dropping into the chair beside Evelyn, and speaking as if he had been deaf to their recent conversation.

"I put to him a question or two," returned Evelyn. "Of course, everything about Ravenstoke is interesting to me now. But I fear I wearied him, as he is gone in search of more improving conversation. Is your cousin very fond of improving his mind, Mr. Connell?"

"It is to be devoutly hoped so," answered Philip, with a glance intended to convey to Evelyn the unspoken words—"for he needs it." "Perhaps I can enlighten you upon some of the matters you would like to know, Miss Evelyn."

"How large is the family, then?" asked Evelyn in an undertone. "There is this one—I conclude—and Mrs. Raven, of course; and—an elder brother?"

Philip nodded. "An elder brother, of course; or Frank," glancing at him, "would not be the younger one."

"Is he at home? Does he live at the Court?"

"Certainly: it is Leonard's own house," said Philip. "He is the reigning squire."

"And there are no other children—no more younger brothers?" she went on.

"No; only Frank. You will find Ravenscourt a beautiful house, Miss Evelyn. And the estate is a good estate. And the genealogy is a long genealogy. Everything is as it should be."

"Ah! but what can that signify to the poor hired companion!" she sighed. "*She* should rest satisfied with the security of her salary and the comfort of her private apartment."

And while they carried on this skirmishing, Miss Agate and Frank were chatting seriously. He had touched and warmed her heart by inquiring after her unseen brother. Few of her visitors did so.

"How is Mr. Agate to-day?" Frank had said, in his shy, pleasant voice. And she looked up at him surprised, with grateful eyes.

"He is very well indeed—for him. I was able to give him a pleasure which he appreciated this morning. Look!" and she stretched out her hand for a small volume, daintily bound in white vellum, which lay on a side table. "This is a book which my brother brought out years ago. It is a collection of old Latin hymns translated by him into English verse. It was his labour of love while he was working as a tutor. And this is a new edition—fresh this week. You should have seen his face when I put it into his hand. And I am so proud of it, too! The hymns are very beautiful, and Theodore had real gifts as a translator, so the contents are worthy of the beautiful binding."

Frank held it in his hand, turning over the leaves, and carefully reading the title-page. It was the publisher's name and address which he wished to see.

"My mother wrote to me this morning," he said presently. "Telling me that she had invited a young lady to visit her. Little did she think I had the pleasure of knowing the household from which she comes. I should like to send a letter and a parcel to my mother by Miss Evelyn's hands. It would please her."

"Certainly. Evelyn will take it for you."

"What are you promising in my name?" interrupted Evelyn.

"Only that you will carry down a little packet from Mr. Frank to his mother," explained the elder lady.

"Oh, surely," cried Evelyn. "I start by the noonday train to-morrow. How shall I get the parcel? It is a long journey from Mr. Connell's chambers here. The railway station itself would be nearer, Mr. Frank." She was not at all unwilling that so presentable a young man should appear as her escort on the platform. Such meetings and partings are tender times, and leave more definite memories than a dozen ordinary social opportunities. Not that she was in the least attracted to Frank: nay, she was rather repelled. But Evelyn Agate was concerned in doing the best for Evelyn Agate, and Evelyn Agate's heart and feelings must give place to mercenary computations.

"I should think nothing of the walk here," said Frank, "only I shall have to make ready the parcel to-morrow. So I will meet you at the station, Miss Evelyn, without fail."

Mary Davies had entered the room with some preparation for the supper, which, in honour of Evelyn's "last night at home," and the invited presence of two guests, was to be rather less simple than usual. The small, pale, clean-looking woman, with the anxious look in her face, spread the table without once lifting her eyes to the two

gentlemen, and having done her duty would have retired in silence, but that Evelyn called her, just as she had her hand upon the door.

"Davies!" she said, in that musically metallic voice which Frank could not endure, "was one Eldred Sloam among your old friends at Ravenstoke? And was he a good man, or a bad one?"

The woman's short answer was inaudible. It was only one word, but whether it was "yes" or "no," or but some short exclamation, nobody could tell. She left the room hurriedly.

"Evelyn, you should not tease Mary. She ——"

Miss Agate's reproof was cut off by the sound of a heavy fall outside. They ran to the rescue. Mary Davies had slipped her foot on the kitchen stairs, and was below in the corner. But when Philip picked her up, it was quite clear that no limbs were broken, or even sprained. She declared she was not hurt, not at all. Her face was very white, and her hands shook violently. "It was only 'shock,'" she said. She would just keep quiet for a bit, if the ladies would excuse her.

So they waited on themselves at supper, and there was little special conversation. Evelyn laughed at Miss Agate's hint that her ill-timed remark, being spoken before company, might have disconcerted Davies and caused her to lose her footing.

This especially amused Evelyn. "The very idea, Aunt Gertrude! As if people, servants especially, could be so easily put out!"

"Don't you love that sweet young woman dearly, cousin mine?" asked Philip, as he passed his arm through Frank's, for the walk homewards. "And what is the gift you are going to send to your mother, if I may ask?"

"I mean to get that beautiful new edition of Mr. Agate's translation of the Latin hymns," readily answered Frank. "I think my mother will be pleased with that." And in his own mind Frank added a few words.—"Such a gift will show her that I am neither hardened nor indifferent, though I do not go home. I never shall go, I think. It is hard to know there's no love for you anywhere in this wide world."

## CHAPTER XV.

### THE VICAR'S PUZZLE.

THE next morning was hot and sultry. Frank arrived at the station in very good time, and so had to wait alone in its closeness and dust. He almost thought that Evelyn meant to lose her train. But no, just at the last moment the little party appeared, Evelyn first, very fresh and trim, Miss Agate toiling behind, looking a little nervous, like a person who has been worried by keeping others up to a necessary mark. She was burdened by sundry hand-bags and

parasols, of which Frank hastened to relieve her. And last of all came Mary Davies, superintending a white wrapped portmanteau.

"I thought it would do us both a good turn if I brought Davies," Miss Agate said, shaking hands with Frank, "she will be the better for the ride in the cab, after her fall, and for the unaccustomed scene. And she was so pleased at the chance of seeing the last of Evelyn."

Davies was hanging on that young woman's movements with timid deprecation, anxiety in her eyes and regret in her face.

"Is it not delightful to find it one's duty to travel first-class?" said Evelyn to Frank, as she took her seat. "Ah, you know nothing of these feelings. These are pleasurable sensations reserved for poor people."

"I don't know," returned Frank, with blunt sincerity. "When we were at school, my father only allowed us third-class fares: he thought anything else ridiculous luxury for boys. In truth I don't think there's much difference. Nothing signifies to healthy people."

"Ah, that is because you do whichever you like, from choice and not from necessity," said Evelyn.

"Not altogether," interposed Gertrude. "It does not matter much to me, either: and I travel third-class from necessity. At least, almost from necessity. There is always so much else to be done with one's money, when one hasn't much."

"Well, some people have different instincts from others," said Evelyn. "And when those instincts have long lain ungratified, their gratification is a very conscious delight. It is part of my nature to love things sweet and soft and pleasant. It may be hereditary, you know," she laughed, "since I do not know who I am. At any rate, Mr. Frank, you must envy me my beautiful journey to your own dear home. I suppose I shall see you there soon?"

"Perhaps not," answered Frank, gravely. "I may not be at Raven for a long time."

"I shall not tell your mother that you say so," said Evelyn: "for I am sure you do not mean it."

And then the whistle sounded and the train was whirled away.

Miss Agate and Frank exchanged a few words and parted, Frank going his way, thinking much more of his parcel and of its destination than of its bearer. Gertrude and her attendant returned home, talking of Evelyn, timing the points of her progress, and trying to imagine what she would be feeling and doing. They never hit the truth. For she was soon sound asleep! She drank her little flask of wine and ate her biscuits almost before the train had crossed the last archway spanning London streets, and then composed herself for a nap. What were the villages she would pass through? Only dull places. What was the ancient forest she would cross? Only trees. Miss Agate would have admitted that her protégée was a little frivolous, perhaps a little unfeeling—nay, even a little selfish. But she never guessed that these dubious attributes, which she kindly set down to

the ebb and flow of a yet unsettled character, were really only the natural product of a shallow, hard, and low nature.

James Sloam and the pony-chaise awaited the young lady at the Raven station. Evelyn alighted in high spirits. She had often envied such a scene as that in which she now figured. The dark trees of the ancestral house in the background, the lingering inquisitive villagers, the neat little equipage; and her own dainty figure at the very front and centre of the stage. She was quite affable to James: yet the boy reported her later as "an awful fine lady." For which Mrs. Sims reproved him.

"The lad takes after his poor mother in more than her plain face," whispered she to Janet Mackay. "*She* was always taking brass for gold if it was done up ornamental."

Mrs. Raven came into the hall, and met the girl on the threshold. Beyond this action itself there was nothing warm in her reception. It was singularly quiet; as lacking in the chilly forms of civility as in the kindlier utterances of genuine hospitality.

Evelyn did not straightway give her Frank's packet then, though she had it in her reticule. Her acquaintance with the son of Ravenscourt was too striking a point to be thrust bluntly forward, and perhaps passed over in a hurry. She would go to her own room first; then, refreshed and trim, return to Mrs. Raven, bearing her son's gift in her hand.

Her quick glance satisfied herself in an instant that the room to which she was led was all that could be desired. The old-fashioned dormitories of Ravenscourt might not be very lofty, but they were large and bright, with white dimity hangings and fresh carpets, and bright chintzes. There were flowers on the toilet-table, flowers on the mantel-shelf, flowers everywhere.

"The mistress hopes very much that you will like your room. She was in here looking over it the moment before you came."

This speech called Evelyn's notice to the attendant who had followed her in. It was Charity Hale, and Evelyn liked neither her nor her address. The old woman's words were harmless enough, but they had no respectful prefix, and Evelyn detected something of familiarity in her tone, and of mockery in her small, peering eye. Evelyn thought she could not do better than at once teach her her place.

"Oh, I did not notice you before," she said, looking the old woman up and down. "I am glad you are here, for I am very tired. Draw off my boots, please."

"Aye, sure," said Charity. "Only I'm aat stiff, that if I kneel down, I don't know how I'm to get on my feet again."

"Oh, never mind, then," answered the baffled Evelyn.

"The younger women have all got their own work, ye see," commented Charity, quite serenely. "But the mistress will hire another to wait upon ye, likely—if you stay. It's no fit task for a poor old body like me."

Evelyn felt that there were insolent meanings in her words, and her face burned. "I shall be able to help myself," she said, with resolved quietness. "Thank you. You may go."

Charity withdrew without a word. And when Evelyn had finished her toilet, and ventured out of her room, feeling quite irresistible in a sea-green muslin robe, trimmed with white frills, she found herself rather at a loss which way to turn. For Ravenscourt was built on an old-fashioned plan, and was full of short corridors and corners and turns. However, after a few moments' bewildered wandering, she encountered a homely-looking, respectful female servant, who volunteered to lead her to the apartment where Mrs. Raven was likely to be.

Mrs. Raven was there, but she was not alone. Seated in an arm-chair, quite comfortably, was an elderly clergyman, whom Evelyn guessed rightly to be the Vicar. She was not sorry that her little story about Frank should have so eligible an auditor.

"I have something for you, madam," she said, addressing Mrs. Raven. "For I have had the pleasure of seeing young Mr. Raven in London. His cousin, Mr. Philip Connell, is a great friend of my adopted aunt, Miss Agate. Your son was good enough to entrust this to my keeping." And she handed the parcel to the widow, allowing her own hands to linger on it for a moment, after the mother's had taken it.

What a strange, quiet woman this Mrs. Raven was, was Evelyn's reflection. For she only looked up with a quick, significant glance at her, and said, "Oh! thank you," as if it was the most natural thing in the world that her son should be on speaking terms with her unknown, hired companion. It seemed to Evelyn almost as if the words did not reach the lady's mind for some time after they had entered her ear. For there was a long pause before she added: "I am glad Frank has seen you. Now he will not think of his home as haunted by a strange figure."

Mr. Toynbee had heard Evelyn's announcement with apparently much stronger interest. He had observed Evelyn intently from the moment she entered the room. Not because she was a pretty girl, though the good Vicar had a kindly eye for pretty girls, just as he had for his roses, or for any other fresh, sweet things. But it struck him that he had seen her somewhere before. When his eyes first rested on her, some old memory had started into sudden life and then sunk down, utterly dormant. Was it her face that he knew? Or the face of somebody like her? And under what circumstances had he previously seen her, or this resembling face? Odder still, two different associations seemed to mix, the one having an atmosphere of interest and pity: the other of dislike and repulsion.

"Ah! the world is very small, after all," said the Vicar, in his cheery tones. "If one went to the backwoods of the west, or the northern territory of Australia, one would find that one's next-door neighbour

was acquainted with one's mother's cousin, and knew all about one's uncle's bankruptcy."

Evelyn turned and looked at him with a faint smile, but said nothing. She thought of her own history, so unsuspected by him, and how, if it is impossible to lose oneself, she could prove it was quite possible to be lost. The reflection gave a touch of pathos to her face, and again the Vicar's gentler memory almost leaped into form, but again sank and eluded him.

Mrs. Raven had taken her son's gift from its paper wrappings. There it was, the dainty vellum-clad book, "Hymns Translated from the Latin, by Theodore Agate." She stood and looked at it—and a vision out of her past life, of hills and woodlands she had not seen for years, rose in her mind, and voices she would never hear again rang in her ears. She wondered why some women can faint and fall when the cold finger of despair touches their hearts, while others stand still, only the more erect and calm for his chill grasp. She wondered why those seem able to die when agony reaches its culminating point, while it only serves to stimulate the tide of vitality in these.

What did Frank know of that past?—*anything?*—or why had he sent her this book? Was everybody hunting her down—running swords into her heart to force her to cry out? Or was it all chance?—all done unconsciously? Was it only something in her own soul which gave significance to recent events? A weird story of her childhood came floating through her brain, wherein a man who had slain another, heard his shriek in the song of birds, saw his grave in every swelling turf, and his name in the veins of every leaf.

There had once been a spot of romance in the dull life of Mrs. Raven: a point from which she might have developed into a being very different from the dreary, conventional woman she was now. That early romance had come to nothing. It did not make it any easier to bear that there was nobody to blame but herself. She never had blamed herself; or thought herself worthy of blame. She had thrown the blame on the laws of society, on the conventional rulings of the world, which do not allow a well-born young lady to throw herself away upon one deemed ineligible. Yet, half-unconsciously to herself, that blighted romance had remained her pleasantest memory; a sort of refuge for her starved and stunted heart.

Such were Mrs. Raven's thoughts and feelings through which the voices of Mr. Toynbee and Evelyn reached her, as a song in the street might reach a prisoner in a condemned cell. She heard the Vicar ask after Frank, and how he was looking, and whether he seemed enjoying his London visit. And then the Vicar rose to go, for it suddenly occurred to him that he might be one too many on the scene, when the new inmate had just arrived, and that Mrs. Raven's strange silence and indifference might be her method of hinting this to him.

However, he had scarcely passed out of the room, before Mrs. Raven stood, with her book in her hand, and spoke to Evelyn. "I feel singularly tired and faint this afternoon. You will not think me inhospitable if I retire to rest for a while? I am not often thus."

"Dear Mrs. Raven!" cried Evelyn, "I am here to relieve you from burdens—not to add another!" She had caught the trick of proud humility from many a better soul among her aunt's guests.

Something like a tear glistened in the widow's pale eyes. "You are a good girl," she said. "You will find books—and please call the servants to show you anything or tell you anything you wish."

And as she passed out of the room, she paused before Evelyn and laid her cold thin fingers over the girl's warm hand, and folded them so for a moment.

"I'm afraid it won't be lively here," reflected Evelyn. "I don't wonder Mr. Frank made his escape. But it is easier to bear with tears and sentimentalities for a good salary than out of mere family affection! I'll try to put up with it—until I've saved some money, at any rate."

The good Vicar was half sorry to have curtailed his visit. Evelyn's face had so "bothered" him, that he would fain have watched it longer, to see whether any fresh or varying expression might aid him in the will-o'-the-wisp memories which started from the past only to elude his grasp.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### THE STRANGER IN THE TRAIN.

"I THINK I'm getting home-sick," Philip Connell announced to Frank, one morning. "What do you say if we both take a run down to Coltburn, and see my old folks and the girls?"

Frank looked up from his coffee, but said nothing.

"Next week will be Michaelmas," continued Philip. "It looks well to go out of town at the regulation holiday times. Seems to people as if one was in the swim, though the fact is that I'm generally busier in holiday times than at any other season."

"How does that come about?" asked Frank, listlessly.

"Why, don't you see? When the real successful workers are glad to turn their backs, that's the very time when a poor devil like me gets a chance. I did get a brief once, Frank; though you may not believe it. It came in on the Saturday after Good Friday, sent in by a miserly old solicitor who went to his office 'for his letters' every day out of the three hundred and sixty-five."

"Hope you got a smart fee with it!"

"Fair enough. They will be awfully glad to see you at home, old boy," added Philip, with a change of tone. "We never invited you to Coltburn, Frank; my people and yours were estranged, you see;

but my mother will rejoice over you: a nephew's place in her heart is still unsupplied. And the governor is a jolly old boy: most ministers are when you know them. You needn't be afraid of him."

"I was never afraid of Mr. Toynbee," said Frank, tartly. "He was always one of my best friends. I should like to see Toynbee again! I hope he doesn't think ill of me."

"Do well for yourself, and then he won't. That's scriptural, Frank."

"I don't feel as if I ought to be paying visits and taking holidays when I've got no home and no work, and no place for myself in all the wide world," said Frank, rather drearily.

"Now don't get into the blues," returned Philip. "It's just the time for a fellow to pay visits, when he can't invite in return; and nobody can say you're neglecting your business when you have none to do."

Frank's face darkened.

"Of course, I'm only chaffing you," Philip added hastily, seeing the cloud. "Next to Ravenscourt, is not our house your home? And what is nearer your duty than a little attention to an aunt—your father's own sister, who would never have been alienated from him but for an influence whose wisdom and kindness you yourself have some cause to doubt?"

Frank did not speak. He knew the allusion was intended for his mother.

"My father is a practical man, too," Philip went on. "He might give you a hint worth getting. He and the mother must have had a hard enough struggle in their own day; and when people once get their eyes well opened they generally keep them so. You can't do better than come with me, Frank. I really want to go; and I wouldn't leave you moping here by yourself."

Frank tacitly yielded. "It's a wonder you are home-sick," he said to Philip. "When you said you did not write to your mother, did you tell an untruth?"

Philip laughed. "Oh dear, no. In our family my father is the general correspondent. I write to him regularly. But one sometimes has to have a little spar with him about money matters and the like, that one doesn't want the mother to go crying over, or talking about to the girls. Any more coffee?"

"No, thank you."

"The governor hinted to me that she got uneasy if he did not show her my letters, and took to fancying I had the croup or something. So I told her I'd always write to her very self if anything of that sort was wrong. Of course, I shouldn't, you know—not if it was anything serious. But when I get a cold or a headache, I write and tell her so, to maintain the delusion and keep her heart at rest."

"I'm glad I don't care much for you," said Frank, with sudden and hearty emphasis.

"Oh come, I say, old boy, but I flattered myself that you did," cried Philip. "And so you do, only you don't know it. That's how it always is," he added, with a comical affectation of sentimentality. "One never can get at the truth—let one try as one may!"

"I know you've been very kind to me. I shouldn't have said what I did. You are the only friend I have," said Frank, dismally.

"The more's the pity," rejoined Philip, with unabated geniality, "and it's all your own fault. But we'll go home to Coltburn and have a jolly time, and you'll get rattled up."

In reality, a very kindly little plot had elaborated itself in Philip Connell's mind. He was sincerely troubled about Frank. All the young fellow's sensitiveness seemed mere morbidness to him. As he put it to himself, he would have bantered the "old lady" into a good temper and defied Leonard. Of course, each side of life had its advantages and its drawbacks, home and Bohemian. One did not get such delicious coffee and rolls at one's chamber breakfasts as one got at home; but then at home one got no oyster suppers. Dainty was the home drapery, and cosey the home blankets; but there one must not smoke at all hours and in all places. So the law of compensation, illustrated by these little things, held throughout.

But there seemed no law of compensation for poor Frank. He did not seem to care for the pleasures which remained for his taking. He was civil enough to Philip's London friends, but, with the exception of Gertrude Agate, he remained a mere outsider. He had dropped his cigars too, whether with an eye to thrift or to self-mortification, Philip could not determine. Anyway, Philip began to be rather concerned for him.

"This is the sort of fellow who kills himself sometimes, or goes mad, or runs to the dogs outright," mused the young barrister. "He can't make believe to be happy when he isn't, as most of us do. He takes his misery unmixed, and that sometimes leads, all of a sudden, to doing ditto with brandy. I will not be solely responsible for him any longer. I'll shuffle him off upon the governor. Besides, the sight of our place, and the mother and the girls, will be a very present picture of the charms he is resigning, and then he won't resign 'em. That's the way to tempt your martyrs out of martyrdom."

There was real kindliness beneath Philip's surface of heartless cynicism, but it was not the kindliness on which a sore heart rests for healing. And if poor Frank had felt desolate at his lonely departure from Ravenstoke, he felt doubly desolate when, in Philip's company, he started from London for Coltburn. Before he did so, there was plenty of time to write to the Court and tell his mother of his intention. He would not seem surreptitiously to change the family habits.

Coltburn was situated in the northern part of the Midlands, and a great part of the journey towards it was sufficiently depressing. After the gentle, daintily-kept slopes and woodlands to the immediate north of London were rapidly passed, there remained little to gaze at, save

a succession of flat and dreary fields, till they arrived at the junction where they changed trains. Nor did this improve the prospect, since it only involved divergence from the main and comparatively open route into the crowd of dirty, commonplace, commercial towns, and dark-looking strongholds of mining districts. And as Frank looked down on the rows upon rows of colliers' huts, with the coarse women lounging at their doors, and the unkempt children rising up from their mud-pies and puddles to shout at the passing train, it seemed as if the world had changed as much as himself. For Frank's past experience lay chiefly with sylvan scenery and its smiling woods and dales. It was at this railway junction that they first exchanged words with the only passenger who had accompanied them from London.

This British silence had not been due to any reserve on Philip's part. He had made several general remarks, and had got no answer from either Frank or the stranger. This stranger was a slight young man, whose small, delicately-cut features and closely-shaven chin allowed his age to be anywhere between twenty and five-and-twenty years. The darkness of his hair and eyes, together with a vague something in his whole bearing, suggested foreign extraction.

"Perhaps he doesn't understand what I say," was Philip's good-humoured mental explanation of this taciturnity, "but I'll speak very slowly next time." But here they at length reached the junction.

As the train slackened speed, the stranger himself spoke. In a low, musical voice, and in the best of English, though with a slightly foreign accent, he addressed Philip.

"Do we wait for the other train on the platform where we alight, or do we require to cross the lines?"

"It depends upon what train one may want," answered Philip, readily. "You wait here for the local train to Dingford and Rissit; you cross one bridge for Coltburn, two for ——"

"Thank you," answered the young man. "I am going to Coltburn."

"So are we," said Philip, sociably. "If you follow us, you can't go wrong."

"Ah, you know it, then!"

"Know it! I was born at Coltburn. I have been passing to and fro all my life. Pleasant little place, Coltburn—to those who know it well, though it may not impress a stranger very favourably."

There was no time for more in the haste of changing trains.

"Have you ever been at Coltburn before?" resumed Philip, when they were again seated.

"Never," answered the stranger.

"If I can be of any service to you, I shall be glad," Philip went on. "I think the Stag Hotel might suit you. The Royal is no better, though it is ever so much dearer, and strangers get 'taken in' here in two or three ways."

"Very many thanks," said the young man, again. "I should have been very much indebted to you under some circumstances, but an acquaintance has already taken apartments for me."

"Oh, you know some Coltburn people?" cried Philip. "That's nice. I daresay we shall come across you again: my folks know everybody. You may have heard the name. Every Coltburnite, of whatever sect, has had some sort of contact with the Reverend James Connell: and he is my father."

The foreigner's pale, sensitive face flushed; and there came a curious flash as of awakening in the dark dreamy eyes. "My friends in Coltburn are—is—one of Mr. Connell's younger sons," he said: "Percy Connell."

"My brother Percy!" responded Philip heartily, holding out his hand. "I'm Philip, the barrister in London, you know: you'll have heard of me. Running down, you see, to be a boy at home for a few days."

"I have heard of Mr. Philip," said the foreigner, taking the proffered hand, and speaking with that inflection of voice and uplifting of the eye which conveys the most delicate of compliments. "But I cannot expect he has ever heard of me. I had the felicity to make friends with your family last year, when they were taking their holiday by the sea at Sandgate. They—Mr. Percy—have kindly kept up a correspondence with me since. My name is Marco Learli."

Nobody notices when a foreigner's nouns, pronouns and verbs do not perfectly agree.

"I have heard of you, then," said Philip; "and have a distinct idea that you were a great item in the enjoyment of that Sandgate holiday. I am glad you should be down when I am."

And he rather wondered within himself why the household hospitality had not been extended to this acquaintance. For besides that the Connells had a spare bed-room, which had grown absolutely shabby with constant use, the young people could, in their own phraseology, "condense" themselves to any extent. But the stranger's next speech explained this.

"Mrs. Connell invited me to stay in her house," he said, in that soft, musical voice. "And I should have been most delighted to do so, but I contemplate a long visit and it will be necessary for me to pursue my usual avocation—that of artist. Yet I hope to see very much of my kind friends, the thought of whom makes Coltburn feel like home to the poor exile who has not even a country of his own."

Philip was accustomed to meet Italians at Miss Agate's house, and he quite understood their pathetic allusions to their land—in those days lying dismembered among alien tyrannies. But this young fellow was so handsome, and so sad, and so sweet-voiced, that Philip thought within himself it was more than likely the mother must have opened a very warm corner of her heart to him.

"This is Detting," observed Philip presently, as the train stopped at a dirty little platform, and the stranger and Frank both looked out. "Here they collect the tickets for Coltburn," continued Philip, getting his own ready. "And here"—and he made a dive at a small newspaper boy, shouting on the platform—"here is the dear old *Coltburn News;* with all its advertisements of desirable and elegant villas close to the railway station, and of eligible and promising servants with three months' bad character from their last place. Let us see what's going on. We generally have some sort of entertainment on the wing—negro minstrels, or a fat pig, or something else, to enliven the natives."

Philip ran his eyes over the paper, turning it from side to side. Suddenly an amused expression, blended with surprise, lighted up his face.

"Ha! here's fun! We shall have some sport with this, Frank. Listen.

"'Arrived in Coltburn: the Great Oriental Mystery, and lineal successor of the Delphic Oracle, Madame Allebasi Elah! Who can look into the Past, see into the Future, and answer questions concerning things you wish to know. In your own interest, lose no time in consulting her. Interviews granted, 5*s.*—Private houses visited, 10*s.* 6*d.* At home between 12 and 4, at Daylight Villa, Coltburn. All letters promptly attended to.'

"What a spree we'll have with her!" was Philip's delighted comment, as he looked up from the paper. "She'll tell our fortunes for us, Frank—and no doubt promise me the Lord-Chancellorship."

"I wish she could tell mine—really," answered Frank.

"We will go to her, old boy. 'Twill be a break in the proprieties of home, if nothing else. Mind, though, we shall have to keep it dark from the governor. And now here we are," broke off Philip, as the train steamed into the station: "and here are Percy and Louisa—brought forth by my telegram. Did they expect you also by this train?" he asked, turning to Learli.

"I think so," said the young man in a faint voice. He looked paler than ever now, perhaps in contrast to the vivid bloom of Louisa Connell, who greeted him almost before the train had stopped. She was a tall, handsome girl, with a slight Raven look about her, inherited from her mother. Even dispirited Frank felt that it would be pleasant if she seemed glad to see him—as glad as she was to see young Learli, for instance. Percy Connell was but a new edition of Philip, and was instantly on the easiest terms with the cousin he had never in his life seen before. Both the sister and the brother pressed their invitations on the Italian.

"It's a downright sell that you are not coming home with us altogether," said Percy.

"Can't you be induced to come even yet?" pleaded Louisa. "Are not Philip and—our cousin—extra attractions?"

"I need no extra attractions, you know," said the young man, with a strange, ghastly smile. "Do not press on me these liberal invitations, or you may have too much of me."

Perhaps, during the running to and fro after the luggage, he and the young lady found time for the interchange of a few private observations. But what could lie in these hurried remarks to account for the gravity and pain which had settled on Louisa's blooming face, as they parted from him, and entered the Connell chaise? Philip took the reins, and Frank was made to take the seat of honour beside him, Louisa and Percy sitting behind.

"Learli's looking bad, Louie," said that outspoken youth, who was own brother to Philip in the way of using his tongue everlastingly. "It gave me quite a start to see him. We shall have to feed him up, or he'll be going off in a decline."

Louisa answered nothing. Her face was turned from him.

"The cousin looks a handsome fellow," continued Percy, in a lowered voice. "Do you think the lady-aunt down at the Court might make it up with all of us if one of you girls married back into the Raven family?"

Miss Connell made one of those "down-setting" remarks in reply which elder sisters know how to administer, but with an added tartness of tone which gave her brother distinctly to understand that he was treading on delicate ground somehow, and had better be silent. As it was quite impossible for him to keep quiet, he bent forward and devoted himself to his seniors in front.

"Look at those placards," he said, pointing to some flaming posters on the wall they were then passing; and which Philip and Frank saw to be further announcements of "the Oriental Mystery."

"Well, who is she? and what is the fun?" asked Philip.

"Goodness knows who she is," said the young fellow. "She only came into Coltburn yesterday, and I've been to see her already. Such a lark? I'll tell you all about it when I get a chance; you'll have to go to her yourself, Philip.—Here we are at home."

Philip drew up gladly. "And here are the young tomboys!" he cried, leaping down, as two little girls of ten and twelve rushed wildly out of the garden gate. "As saucy and sturdy as ever," he added, kissing them heartily.

"And that is the new governess," said Percy, as a small, sweet-looking young woman in deep mourning came forward, watchful over her charges. "Miss Alice Cleare," announced he to Frank: "and she's one of the right sort," he added in a whisper.

And Frank Raven, in the days to come, often remembered that rough-and-ready introduction.

*(To be continued.)*

# MR. LANDON.

By the Author of "Mrs. Jerningham's Journal."

## I.

THE whole family were assembled in the windows of the sitting-room, to watch for Mabel's return home. If the visit to her aunt's had been an event, what was the coming back from it? It was only six weeks ago since Fanny and Ursula had helped to make the muslin dresses, and sew the lace on the pretty black silk mantle, which, to their unsophisticated eyes, seemed wonderful finery. Only six weeks since the schoolboy Herbert had flung one of nurse's old shoes after the retreating carriage that bore away the eldest born, the universal favourite, friend, and darling, on her first visit from home. What an age they had imagined those six weeks, beforehand. How short a time they had seemed in passing—and now they were over, actually over, and Mabel was coming home. The expectation was joy, its fulfilment rapture. The slim, fair, smiling girl was amongst them once more, with an avalanche of brothers and sisters overwhelming her, the happy mother, having had the first kiss, serenely resigning her to their embraces.

What a delightful party crowded round the tea-table, by-and-by. What questions, what answers, what talking of a dozen tongues at once, what bursts of laughter, what innocent joy! While one and all devoured the pretty creature with their eyes, and kept declaring that she was their own old Mabel, just the same as when she had left them.

Only the mother looked into the blue eyes of her darling, and in their transparent depths saw something that sent a thrill through her matronly heart, with the certainty that she was *not* the same, and would never through all her life be "just the same" again.

The first moment they were alone together—and that was not till the tired little maiden had been conducted into her bed-room by her adoring sisters, and at last left to go to her bed—the anxious mother, full of hopes and fears, had glided into it. In that first moment, then, she slid her arms round her daughter, and whispered, "Have you anything to tell me?"

The sweet face, all one blush, was hidden on her shoulder.

"Oh yes, mamma—yes."

Then the mother felt that her darling was hers no longer, and that a new life—full, she trusted, of a higher and deeper happiness than the innocent past—was prepared for her child. Oh, that it might be covered with roses and sunshine; that true love might illumine it. But all she said to her child was, with tender caresses, "Who is it?"

"Mr. Landon, mamma," whispered Mabel softly, as a shy, happy fairy might breathe the name of her lover.

The clergyman's wife stood as one stunned. She had fallen back from her daughter, and gazed at her with wide-opened, unbelieving eyes.

"Mr. Landon!" she cried. "That charming man whom everyone was in love with?"

Mabel laughed; raised her blushing face, and threw back her sunny curls with the old saucy movement her mother knew so well.

"Yes," she said. "But then you see, mamma, *he* liked only—*me*."

"That rich man!" said Mrs. Middleton; and it is to her credit that *that* was only her second thought and that she hastily added, "And so clever and delightful in every way—at least, so your aunt said, Mabel."

"Indeed he is," replied the girl, at once earnestly and bashfully. "He is everything that is amiable and charming and good—nobody seemed able to admire or like him enough. And he is richer than anybody we ever heard of, mamma, except papa's old pupil, Lord Eversham."

"It is a very short acquaintance, my Mabel."

"Yes, it is," gravely and thoughtfully; "but that does not always signify, does it, mamma? You may be years knowing some people, and some you know in a minute."

"And did he pay you a great deal of attention, Mabel?"

"I don't really know, mamma. It never occurred to me that he cared for me until yesterday. I happened to be alone in the conservatory, and he happened to come in—and then—then—then—he told me he loved me. And so it was all settled, and Aunt Letty was delighted, and said you and papa ought to jump for joy."

"I'm sure, my darling, we are as glad and thankful as possible—at least I am, and so will papa be when he hears about it. And where is his home, dearest? Where will my Mabel have to live?"

"I don't know one bit, mamma; I never thought about that. But here's a letter to papa from Aunt Letty; perhaps that will tell more about him, and he is coming here himself to-morrow."

"To-morrow! Oh my goodness, Mabel! and there's nothing in the house fit for his dinner. It is *such* a time of year: lamb is still so dear, and as for chickens—well now, really I don't know what we can have."

"Oh, never mind, mamma, I don't think he cares a bit what he eats. He has been a great deal abroad, you know, in Russia and Siberia, and those sort of places, where people can't afford to be particular; and he is not coming to stay in the house—Aunt Letty settled all *that* with him. He will take a bed at the Crown, and just be in and out—and I know you'll like him directly, and that you won't mind him, he is so amiable and bright."

"And are his parents living? Has he any brothers and sisters?"

"Ah, well! how *very* odd, mamma. I don't believe we any of us ever thought of *that* for a minute. We were all of us only thinking of *him*, and I haven't a notion if he has any relations, or anything about them. Dear me, I hope they will like me, if he has! How curious it will seem to have fresh brothers and sisters!"

"Well, my love, I think I shall take your aunt's letter to your papa; perhaps that will tell us more about him than you can. At any rate, to-morrow will answer all questions that we shall care to ask."

So leaving her pretty Mabel to dream of that blissful to-morrow, Mrs. Middleton hastened to her husband's dressing-room, her heart beating fast with joy, pride, and thankfulness.

This was the letter, which, after a few words of eager explanation, she read over his shoulder:

"My dear Brother,—I do think I have made a very pretty job of my first attempt at chaperoning a niece, and I only hope I may be able to do half as well for my own daughters, poor poppets, when they are old enough, as I have for yours. I congratulate you on the prospect of a son-in-law with ten thousand a-year, and who is one of the most charming men in Europe. Only think of our little Mabel proving more attractive than all the smart, accomplished girls he met here! and only think of a week having done it all, and decided the child's fate for life! He only arrived on Tuesday night—you know Sir George had written to me about him from St. Petersburg, and could not praise him enough, and Sir George is such a straight-laced old gentleman, that one is sure a young man must be almost too proper of whom he writes with enthusiasm. And he told me that he had ten thousand a-year, and was coming to England to buy a place. So we made great fun about it beforehand, and all the girls were ready to set their caps at him, and then when he came he was so charming that they all began to fall really in love with him. As to Lady Macgregor, as I told your wife in my last letter, she got in one of her desperate ways, and was always calling him off from any-one else, to make him do something or other for one of her three. However, it was of no use; marriages are made in Heaven, and Heaven had decided that our Mabel was to be Mrs. Landon. The dear child's amazement was the most amusing thing, and I do believe she thought of all of you more than of herself. However, he has talked her into a very pretty amount of bashful preference, and as she considers him the best and most superior of created beings, another week's courtship will find her desperately in love. She is a darling, and of course I will come to her wedding. Mr. Landon will make magnificent settlements, and knows she is not to have a penny.

"Your affectionate Sister,

"Letitia."

The father and mother looked at each other, and said, "Ten thousand a-year!"

"And such a good man," added she.

"Sir George's praise is enough to make one easy and thankful," said he.

"She seems so happy," said Mrs. Middleton.

"And I thought she was a child still," sighed he. "Why, how old *is* she, mamma?"

"Well, she was eighteen last birthday, and she is a clever girl, with excellent sense. I was only nineteen when you thought *me* old enough to be a wife, my dear."

"Yes, but then you were not my own child whom I had known as a baby only the day before; you flashed on me all at once as an adorable young lady."

"And that is how our Mabel has flashed on Mr. Landon. But oh! my dear Jack, he is coming here to-morrow!"

"Of course he is," said the Reverend Jack, thoughtless of the state of the larder, or the price of lamb; "and quite right too."

"But it *is* so difficult to receive a guest like that, in our little way. Why, even the dinners ——"

Now Mrs. Middleton was a very sensible woman, but, being a woman, she could not help (and she was quite right) troubling herself about these things. But when her husband said their part was simply to do the best they could, and not pretend to be better than they were, she sincerely agreed with him.

"Only," she added, "one does like—and there's no pretence in *that* —to be seen at one's best and not at one's worst. Do you remember the only time Lady Eversham ever called here, was the only time the white hen ever walked into the drawing-room! That was not being seen at one's best, certainly."

And she laughed at the recollection, while her husband patted her cheek as fondly as he had some twenty years before, when he had consoled the distressed young housekeeper for the white hen's entrée.

## II.

He came, saw, and conquered. Everybody was delighted with him—except Mr. Harvey. And who was he? He was the curate, a sensible man of about thirty, of good family and good expectations, who was only acting as curate until an excellent family living fell vacant, and who thought Mabel Middleton the sweetest, dearest, prettiest, and best little angel that any man, be he who he may, need ever wish to have as a wife.

Mr. Harvey did not like him.

Mr. Landon was tall and good-looking, with a bright pleasant face, almost boyish in its expression of fresh good humour; agreeable manners; sound and sensible in conversation, quite the gentleman, and devoted to Mabel. And yet Mr. Harvey did not like him.

Why? Was it jealousy? No—he told himself that it was *not*

jealousy, but that there was something about Mr. Landon which created a feeling of distrust.

Everybody else trusted him, liked him, admired him, went into a state of enthusiasm about him, and finally, before he had been a day in the house, adored him.

Mr. Harvey was in a minority of one.

The interview with Mr. Middleton was most satisfactory, and he ate his dinner as if he enjoyed it, declared the potatoes were the best he had ever tasted, and that sirloin of beef was delicious after Russian fare. So Mrs. Middleton had nothing to disturb the happiness with which she looked from her guest to her daughter, and thought of the delightful life which she believed lay stretched before them.

In the evening Mabel and her lover were left alone in the drawing-room. Mr. Landon had a very charming way of making love, and Mabel found that it was a very agreeable thing indeed to be made love to. After a great many delicious nothings had been uttered, he began to form plans after the fashion of lovers.

"I think we must be married very soon," he began, "and then I will take you abroad."

Mabel only blushed at the first paragraph of his speech, but she smiled at the second, and said softly, "I *do* wish to see Switzerland."

"Switzerland!" said he, with marked contempt. "Oh, that's just like stepping out into one's own front garden. Yes, to be sure, you shall go to Switzerland, and Italy, and those little places, if you like; but *I* thought of South America and Africa. There are charming localities in both, that have been very little tampered with." And he gave her one of his bright, sweet, almost boyish smiles, that made her feel life must be delightful with him anywhere. "And then," he continued, "we shall come back after we have explored the world, and find a home; a home in either England or Scotland. Which shall it be? Have you any especial fancy? I think the Highlands might do."

"Oh yes! it will be exquisite to live in the Highlands. But I have always had such a notion of Devonshire."

"Well, why not both? A castle in the Highlands, and a park in the sweet southern county, summer and winter residences; and then a house in London, of course; and then frequent trips abroad. Would that be a pleasant life, my Mabel?"

"Yes," said she, laughing; "if life is long enough to live in so many places."

"When we get old, we will fix in whichever we like best. Think of growing old together! Only I can't fancy that sweet face ever growing old."

"And then to have all of them come and stay with us!"

"Yes. How those fine boys and pretty girls will enjoy it, and

the dear father and mother; and then we must give parties—stately dinner parties and brilliant balls—and then, when we have had our fill of gaiety, fly off to Africa for a bit."

As they talked, Mabel had moved forward to a little table to arrange some flowers in a vase that stood upon it, and her delicate fingers were busy with lilies and roses. A slight pause made her glance round at her lover, who, to her amazement, she found was making the most horrible grimaces, and pointing at her with his finger in a manner which, for the moment, struck her as quite shocking. She uttered an exclamation, but he changed his position and composed his countenance so rapidly that, with a bewildered sensation, she almost fancied her eyes had deceived her; and, as he immediately resumed the conversation, she felt too timid to say anything about what she had seen.

Half an hour more of the delightful talk common to lovers put everything else out of her head, and the rest of the evening was spent most agreeably with the family, who assembled at the usual hour for tea. The next day everything was couleur-de-rose, and Mabel, in her new happiness, wondered how it was that anybody ever had care or trouble.

"What a beautiful world it is," said she to Mr. Landon, as they were strolling together in the little wood near the Rectory.

"Beautiful? yes," he cried; "it is beautiful. It is a world of pleasures, and every pleasure brings duties along with it, which make it doubly dear. The ties that are to bind us, my darling, will give us new duties that we never had before, and if we buy a house we shall have duties to perform to the poor people, and to our dependants and servants."

"That is a charming way of putting it," said Mabel, looking up to him with tender reverence. "How good you are! you must tell me of all my duties, and show me what I ought to do."

"We will tell and show each other," replied he, "setting out with the one principle, that every fresh step we take brings fresh duties along with it, and that they are all the consequences of our happiness, and therefore to be considered as part of it, and valued accordingly."

"You are so rich," said Mabel, "and riches carry such responsibilities with them. Now I have never been rich, you know, so all the duties I have known anything about are those belonging to—well, not actual poverty—but to having to do all sorts of things, and be as useful as one can."

"I shall like making you rich," he cried, smiling. "It is much nicer than if you had always been well off; everything will seem so pleasant to you."

She gave him a grateful look and smile. "What have I done to be so happy?" she said softly.

And so they passed on into the woods. Into the woods, where their feet trod on the delicious moss carpet, while flowers blossomed

around them, and birds sang above their heads. An intricate network of green leaves broke the sky up into little pieces of sparkling blue light, each one of which brought to Mabel's heart a promise of some fresh happiness. The path became narrower, and Mr. Landon fell behind her, while a soft sweet silence took the place of their former animated conversation. Suddenly she turned round to speak to him, and there he was pointing at her with his forefinger, and making the same horrible grimaces that had startled her the day before. Every feature of his face seemed altered, his complexion looked grey, while the very colour and shape of his eyes appeared changed by the demoniacal contortions. There was something so shocking in seeing such a creature as this standing behind her and pointing at her in this cool and beautiful wood, and with all the thoughts and feelings in her mind called up by their previous conversation, that Mabel could not bear it and screamed aloud. Mr. Landon turned quickly aside, and, stretching his arm up into a tree, brought down a lovely branch of honeysuckle. When he turned towards her again he had his own face, and he presented the flowers to her with his own peculiar bright, sweet smile; but she thought she saw that his lip was quivering, and that drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"Mr. Landon," she said, timidly, really not knowing how to proceed.

"What is it, my dearest?" was the reply.

"Why did you—why do you—?" and she hesitated and stopped again, from the extreme difficulty of putting the fact into words, and of asking her lover why he made horrible faces, and pointed at her whenever her back was turned.

"I did nothing, dearest," he answered in a tone of tender reproof. Don't be fanciful, my Mabel."

Fanciful! Was she fanciful? Could she twice have *fancied* such a thing as that? But how could she tell him? What could she say? Silenced but not convinced, and decidedly frightened, she led the way into a walk by which they would soon reach home. But Mr. Landon was at her side again as quickly as possible, and his delightful conversation had almost effaced the impression made by his strange behaviour before they had arrived at the Rectory gate.

Her spirits, however, did not quite recover themselves, and she was pale and thoughtful when, after the usual evening toilettes had been performed, the party assembled for tea.

After this, two or three days passed away pleasantly enough, and Mabel began to recover herself, and to feel more at her ease. Mr. Landon was making all the world fond of him; he was so bright and cheerful, so conformable—no slight merit in a new member of a large family party—fell into all their ways so naturally; while his conversation, his opinions, and his evident standard, were all higher and better than those of nine young men out of ten. He was also desperately in

love with his pretty, shy Mabel, as everybody might see. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton were delighted with him ; the girls and children adored him.

And Mabel? Mabel was happy. Sometimes she forgot those strange occurrences ; sometimes she almost persuaded herself they had only existed in her own fancy, and had not really happened. Mrs. Middleton watched her a little anxiously for a time, and then felt satisfied that all was right. Mr. Landon was eager that the wedding-day should be fixed, and, as there really was no reason for delay, September was spoken of, and then August, after the custom of those who have to fix wedding-days. It was now near the end of June.

## III.

Mabel happened to come down stairs a little earlier than usual one morning, and, passing the door of her father's study, heard an odd noise inside. The door stood half open, and she peeped in. She saw a sight which I daresay she never forgot as long as she lived. Mr. Landon was there by himself, and was, in a quiet, solemn manner, dancing about the room, and making the same shocking contortions of countenance that had so frightened her on two former occasions. She gave a little scream, and, without pausing for a second, turned round and rushed upstairs into her mother's room, which she entered breathless and panting.

Mrs. Middleton, who was occupied in putting the finishing touches to her simple morning toilet, was very much astonished by her daughter's appearance.

"I cannot bear it, mamma ! I cannot bear it !" Mabel cried, in great agitation.

"What is it, my love? what has happened?"

"Mr. Landon, mamma. Oh, what shall I do?" and she wrung her hands helplessly.

"My dear, you have not quarrelled, surely ! Oh, I hope not !"

"Quarrelled? No, no, mamma ; but it is so dreadful, so odd ! He— But I *can't* tell you. Come and see yourself."

Mrs. Middleton silently followed her daughter down stairs, who led her straight into the study, where they found Mr. Landon sitting in the easy-chair reading the newspaper. He got up, smiling and cheerful as ever.

"So," he said, "you have discovered me? What will the Rector say? I actually strolled in here to read yesterday's newspaper ; for when this young lady is with me I find politics impossible. Oh, Mabel, you have a great deal to answer for !"

"What is it, Mr. Landon?" said the mother anxiously.

He looked surprised. "The *Times*," he replied, after a minute, holding the paper out to her. "I was reading the foreign news."

"Why did you bring me here, Mabel?" asked Mrs. Middleton.

Mabel stood, pale and shamefaced, beside her.

"Oh, mamma, come away!" she said.

"Dear Mabel," said Mr. Landon, kindly and anxiously, "what is the matter? Are you not well?"

"No, I am not well," answered Mabel, without knowing what she said. "But you, Mr. Landon—did you—didn't you—?" She stopped abruptly, colouring violently, and not knowing how to put her question into words. She felt that she *could* not ask him why he had been dancing so solemnly by himself in her father's study, and making such dreadful faces all the time he danced.

"Mabel, I must insist on an explanation," said her mother.

Mabel burst into tears. Mr. Landon was much distressed, and repeated several times that she certainly must be ill. Mrs. Middleton drew her daughter's hand within her arm, and led her away into her own room. There she made her sit quietly down, and after a few minutes she said: "Now, my dear Mabel, you really must explain what this means."

"Mamma," said she, with a violent effort, "he frightens me."

"My *dear* child! he—Mr. Landon—frighten you! But how is it possible? How can that gentle, cheerful, tender, devoted man frighten you?"

Mabel hid her face and tried to speak, but could not. At last, taking courage, she said, desperately, "He makes faces!" and then sat still, with hidden face, trembling violently. She did not see her mother's look of blank wonder and dismay. There was a little pause.

"Well, my dear," said Mrs. Middleton at last, "I think you are *not* quite well." And gently taking Mabel's trembling little hand into hers, she slid her fingers on to the wrist, and felt her pulse.

"Mamma, I am not ill—but he does—he *does*——"

"Oh, never mind that, love. Many people do; there is nothing in that; don't think about it, or care for it—yes, of course—but you shall lie down here quietly on the sofa, and I will send you up some tea and toast. Don't attempt to come down to breakfast."

And Mabel submitted without a word, and allowed her mother to place her on the sofa, and make her quite comfortable. Then, when left alone, she shut her eyes and endeavoured to compose herself. "It is such nonsense," thought she; "there *can't* be anything in it—there is nothing that it *can* mean. How foolish I am to be frightened! I daresay I more than half fancied it."

And then she stopped to wonder at herself for supposing *that* possible. Fancied that solemn dance, and those horrible faces! Mrs. Middleton sent one of the boys off for the doctor immediately, and told her husband that she had done so, and that Mabel was not well.

Mr. Landon was most properly distressed when he heard of her indisposition, and blamed himself. He feared he had made her walk and talk too much, and he volunteered to go away for the

whole day, and not show himself till tea-time. He would run up to London, and get some of the necessary business settled.

Dr. Philpotts arrived soon after breakfast, and was taken by her mother up to Mabel, who meanwhile had quieted down, and begun to persuade herself that she had been making a great fuss about nothing. She had bathed her eyes, smoothed her hair, and looked much like her usual self when the doctor entered.

"Well," he said, "the young lady does not look as if there was much amiss. Any headache? languor? loss of appetite?"

"No, indeed," replied Mabel, "none at all."

"Let me see your tongue, if you please."

Mabel obeyed.

"A very good tongue indeed, ma'am," addressing himself to Mrs. Middleton.

"She is feverish, Doctor—is nervous, has fancies."

"Hum—nervous is she? has fancies? Let me feel your pulse, my dear. An excellent, healthy pulse as ever I felt in my life! Nobody with such a pulse as that has any *right* to be nervous or to have fancies. I give Miss Mabel a clean bill of health!" And so he took his leave.

"Mr. Landon has gone up to London, my dear," said Mrs. Middleton, still looking very uncomfortable. Mabel gave a start of relief.

"Well, mamma," she said, "don't ask me any more about it, please, and let me teach the children as usual, and help you in everything, as I have not done since I came home."

Mrs. Middleton went down into the Rector's study, where she found him closeted with Mr. Harvey.

"Dr. Philpotts says there is nothing the matter with Mabel," she said.

"That's all right," replied her husband. "But here's Harvey telling me that Mr. Landon is not worthy of her, and is not a man to be trusted!"

"Now that's very unfair," said Mr. Harvey, colouring a good deal. "You asked my opinion, and forced me to say what I thought, and then you blurt it out to Mrs. Middleton, as if I had volunteered it."

"Never mind," said she, smiling, though she did not lose her anxious expression. "I know Mr. Middleton's ways, and I know yours, but Mabel has been complaining herself."

"Complaining!" cried the Rector. "What does she complain of?"

"She says," replied his wife, speaking slowly and reluctantly, "that he makes faces at her!"

"Just exactly what I should have expected," said Mr. Harvey, hastily.

"Now that *must* be nonsense," said the lady, not able to keep from laughing, worried as she was. "You *can't* have expected that."

Mr. Harvey laughed a little also, and coloured a good deal.

"Well," he said, "of course, I didn't mean exactly *that*. What I meant was—or rather what I should expect—that is—in fact——"

"In fact, you don't know what you *did* mean," said the Rector; "no more does Mabel either, I imagine. Well, well, she'll pass a day like other people to-day, and will miss Mr. Landon's devotion not a little, I imagine. But I am glad Dr. Philpotts pronounces there is nothing the matter with her."

Mabel taught the children, played with Isabel, chattered with her sisters, made a cake for tea, and, before the early dinner-time, had quite recovered her composure. Mr. Landon returned while they were all sitting at tea. He had pleasant salutations for everyone, but went straight up to Mabel, to whom he addressed himself with the utmost tenderness, and beside whom he seated himself. He soon contrived to get hold of her hand under the table, and slipped something on to the "engaged finger." When the pretty little hand made its appearance again above-board a magnificent ring of diamonds and rubies was glittering upon it. After tea he begged her to come out into the garden with him. They strolled about, and if Mabel was a little more silent than usual, Mr. Landon was delightful and talked enough for two. "I do think," he said, after a great deal of charming conversation, "that Mabel is the very prettiest and dearest name in the world."

"You have never asked me to call *you* by your Christian name," answered she, with a delicate little pout.

"No," he said, smiling, "and reason good, too!"

"Why, what is your Christian name? How odd I should not know it!"

"I have none," he replied quietly.

"But that is impossible," cried she, laughing. "You can't have been called Mr. Landon all your life! by all your relations, not when you were a little boy."

He said nothing.

"Do tell me what your Christian name is," she urged.

"But what if I really have none?"

"Nonsense; everybody has."

"*Most* people have, I admit; but why should there not be exceptions?

"But there couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"Oh, because—but now, really, why do you talk so? You *know* you have a Christian name. *Everybody* has a name, and, of course, you have too."

"What will our names matter in the heart of Africa or in the depths of a South American forest?" asked he abruptly.

"I don't know," she cried, with some excitement. "Why should that make any difference? But I don't want to go there—I had rather not go to Africa. I had rather remain in England."

He smiled at her very kindly. "You will delight in the life," he said. "I think I see you there now—I know how you will like it."

"But you won't take me there *unless* I like?" said Mabel timidly, and with her heart beating very fast.

"My darling, I will take you *nowhere* unless you like," replied he, with the sweetest smile. But, for the first time, it struck Mabel that there was a cold determination lurking beneath that boyish sweetness, and she turned faint and sick, though the next moment she told herself it was folly, and worse than folly, and hated herself for taking up such a notion.

Then he began telling her about the Highland castle he hoped to buy, where she would reign a sort of chieftainess, and play the "Lady Bountiful" to all the poor Scotch people about them.

"We will build a church, if there is none near," he said, "and schools, and model cottages, and everything that can be thought of to make people wise, and good, and happy."

"That will be delightful," said Mabel.

"And we will employ them; we will not let them be idle; we will find them plenty to do—and then give them balls, and fêtes, and dinners, and feasts, so that the play element of our nature may have full development also. We will not be satisfied with their being *only* industrious and well-behaved, *our* poor people shall be happy."

"How good and kind he is," thought Mabel; "there certainly *is* no one like him in the world." She raised her eyes, beaming with love, to his face, on which the now fully-risen moon shed her cold mysterious light, and there, though she could hardly say how or why, she beheld something that reminded her of the horrible grimaces that she had several times seen him make. He was *not* making them, and yet his countenance did not look quite natural, or like itself; the dreadful shape into which his features could be twisted, and, even more, the dreadful expression that came with that shape, seemed in some strange tremulous way to be lurking behind the normal face, and to be a real existence, only waiting to be called into sight; not a mere action caused by a voluntary play of the muscles. She felt unreasonably frightened, and as if she could not bear to look at him more, and yet an odd fascination kept her eyes fixed on his face; and then it seemed to her as if he, too, knew of that existence impatient to usurp the place of his natural face, and that the knowledge made him uneasy under her gaze.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed suddenly, and put his hand up to his mouth, turning from her as he did so. And Mabel, unable to control herself longer, fled wildly towards the house. She went to her own room to compose herself, and, pacing up and down the floor in a bewildered state, told herself over and over again that she was either the most unfortunate or the most foolish girl in the world.

When at last she felt courage and calmness enough to go down

stairs, she found Mr. Landon already in the drawing-room, holding a skein of worsted, which her mother was winding.

"Do you always run away from people in pain?" said he pleasantly. "I had *such* a twinge of toothache while we were in the garden, but this charitable lady has cured me at once." And he nodded in a friendly manner at Mrs. Middleton.

"Was that all?" asked Mabel. She could not help saying it.

"All!" he answered. "Is not that enough? What more would you doom me to bear, than the worst of all the ills that flesh is heir to?"

"There are worse things than toothaches," replied Mabel, and wondered as she said the words at the strange solemn voice in which she had uttered them.

"Listen to the oracle," cried her father, laughing.

"There," exclaimed Mr. Landon, rising from his seat, "did not I hold that skein beautifully?"

"You have been used to such work," said Mrs. Middleton, smiling. "You have held skeins, if I mistake not, for your mother and sisters."

"I have none," answered he.

"No? I am sorry for that."

"I have neither father, nor mother, nor brother, nor sister. I doubt whether I have a relation in the world."

"Sir George Weyland knew your father," remarked Mr. Middleton.

"Yes, so he tells me; and there he has the advantage of me. My father died before I was born, and my mother directly afterwards. They were both in Mexico, where my father amassed great wealth as a merchant, which he bequeathed to me, and which I have had the good fortune to double."

"You are not a merchant now, I think?" said Mr. Middleton, not sorry for the opportunity of discussing such matters a little with his future son-in-law.

"No," he replied. "I did not care to go on adding gold to gold. Ten thousand a year should, I think, content any man—or woman either," added he, directing one of his bright sweet smiles towards Mabel.

"I can't *think* how anybody could spend such a sum as that in one year," said Fanny. "It must be very difficult."

Her elders laughed.

"Do you think you could sing to-night, Mabel?" asked her lover. She shook her head.

"I seem to have lost all control over my voice," she replied. "I fear I shall only break down again, as I did before."

"I don't believe the child *is* well, mamma, in spite of Dr. Philpotts' opinion," said her father, after regarding her attentively. "She doesn't look a bit like herself."

"I don't think I am, papa, somehow," answered she.

In fact, she was beginning to think that she was *not* well—that she *was* feverish—or that some strange hallucination had come over her senses. When she remembered what had happened in the garden, the panic that had seized her, the extraordinary notion that she had taken up about Mr. Landon's face as she saw it for the first time by moonlight, and then that, after all, it appeared he had only had the toothache, she suddenly thought that the whole thing must really be in herself, and that Mr. Landon had not made any faces at all! If she had put herself into such a state because he had a twinge of toothache, what trifles, on the former occasions, might not have made her take fright, and behave in the foolish way she had done?

But while these thoughts had possession of her bewildered mind, the conversation continued merrily, and when she roused herself to know what was going on round her, she found Fanny was saying:

"Well, *my* happiest associations are with the hayfield."

"And mine," cried Jack, "with the Squire's barn, when we have the ferrets, and *lots* of rats."

"And mine," said the Rector, "with Durham Cathedral."

"And mine," said his wife, "with a rocky seashore."

"And mine," said Mr. Landon, "with Aunt Letty's conservatory."

There was a little laugh at that, and Mabel was eagerly called on by everybody to state what *hers* were, but she hesitated, and would not say.

"If conferring happiness on another is the greatest we are capable of receiving ourselves, as someone says," said Mr. Landon, "yours ought also to be with that pretty little conservatory."

"With which gallant speech—as nothing can surpass it—we will close the evening," said Mr. Middleton. "To bed, young people, to bed."

The bell was rung for prayers, after which they all separated for the night. Mabel was the last of the ladies to go upstairs, as she always "tidied" the room, putting in their proper places all the books and other waifs and strays which had been left about during the day, before she bid her father good night. She now kissed him, and shook hands with Mr. Landon, as they stood chatting together on the hearthrug. The latter naturally enough followed her out of the room, to take a more lover-like farewell at the foot of the stairs, up which she ran, feeling almost happy again, with her candle in her hand.

The former rector had been a rich man, and among the elegancies he had introduced into the Parsonage were several mirrors, one of which was let into the wall at the top of the first flight of stairs. In this Mabel saw her light airy figure, in its floating blue muslin dress, with the blue ribbon in her fair curls, rapidly approaching herself. But that was not all. She saw also Mr. Landon, as she had left him standing in the passage below; and oh, the horror of that sight!

His countenance was like nothing human she had ever beheld. The only idea it conveyed to her affrighted mind was that of an idiot who had suddenly gone mad—an insane idiot! That was all she could think of. A lifelong imbecile, to whom intellect had just that moment been granted, in the shape of madness; and all the horrors of his expression were directed towards her retreating figure, at which he pointed horribly with his extended finger.

## IV.

The candle dropped from her hand with a loud crash, and Mabel knew nothing more till she found herself in her mother's room and in her mother's arms—how she got there she never remembered—trembling violently, and sobbing and gasping on her shoulder.

"Mamma, I cannot marry him—I cannot, cannot marry him," she said at last; and then she grew suddenly calm, and repeated, "No, mamma, I cannot marry him."

"My own dear child, you shall marry no one unless you like it. My dearest Mabel, pray tell me what has happened."

"He frightens me to death."

"But why, my dear love, what can he do that frightens you? he is the gentlest and most lovable of men."

"Mamma, he makes the most dreadful faces, and points at me in the most horrible manner, with his finger," and she extended her own as she spoke, "whenever my back is turned."

"My dearest Mabel!"

"It is *true*, mamma, he does indeed. I cannot marry him; the engagement *must* be broken off."

"My darling, it must be fancy, he can't do *that;* and just imagine breaking off an engagement, and giving that as the reason. No woman ever broke off an engagement on the plea that the man made faces at her."

"I can't help it, mamma—everything must once be first, and not have happened before. Other women may afterwards, though I am the first. But I *couldn't* go into the heart of Africa with him."

"Into the heart of Africa!"

"Yes, mamma, has he not told you? He intends to take me into the heart of Africa, and he says he has no Christian name."

"My dear love, you are dreaming; but what *is* his Christian name? How odd I should never have thought of it. What is it, Mabel?"

"He says he has none, mamma; but if he was to make those dreadful grimaces at me when I looked at him over my shoulder in the heart of Africa, and point at me thus with his finger," and again she imitated the action as she spoke, "mamma, I should die of fright. I am quite sure I should."

Mrs. Middleton looked at her daughter with eyes full of apprehension.

"My darling," she said, "you *are* ill, whatever Dr. Philpotts may say to the contrary. You shall go to bed now, and keep quite quiet, and don't distress or worry yourself. You shan't go with him into the heart of Africa, he shan't make faces at you, and you shan't marry him unless you like. Trust to me, my darling."

"Will you and papa let me break off the engagement?"

"Do you not love him, Mabel?"

"No, mamma, I don't *think* I do; but I'm sure I don't want to marry him. I *should* have loved him had he continued what he appeared during that week at Aunt Letty's; but when he makes those dreadful faces at me I feel nothing but fear, and the idea of marrying him is abhorrent to me, so I don't suppose I can love him *very* much—do you, mamma?"

"Well, dearest, never mind that now. Let me undress you, and settle you comfortably for the night."

So Mrs. Middleton undressed her poor little frightened daughter, and made her drink camphor julep, and then sat by her bedside till Mabel fell fast asleep, when she stole softly away to her own room, where her husband was fast asleep also. But Mrs. Middleton did not close her eyes that night. In the morning early she sent for Dr. Philpotts again. The Rector had an appointment, and was to breakfast away from home, so she would not worry him by telling him before he started that there was anything amiss. Dr. Philpotts expressed great surprise at this second summons.

Mrs. Middleton at once took him to Mabel's room, when he again felt her pulse, examined her tongue, and asked a few medical questions.

"Mamma," said Mabel, "may I say something to him?"

"Certainly, my love."

"Dr. Philpotts, will you please tell me is there any disease that causes people to make faces?"

"To make faces? What an odd idea. No disease that you can have, my dear."

"No, no; but is there any?"

"Well, I knew an old paralytic doctor who was still able to visit his patients, and suddenly when talking to them, sitting, as I might be now, at your bedside, you know, would make very ugly faces at them—ha, ha, ha!"

"But could a young person, quite strong, and going about in apparently good health, do *that?*"

"No, certainly not, Miss Mabel, certainly not."

"Well, then, is there no other disease that could make them do it?"

"There is St. Vitus's dance you know."

"Oh, how does that show itself—*dance*. Do they *dance*, Dr. Philpotts?" And she shuddered as she spoke.

"No, no, they don't dance; they turn themselves about and contort themselves, and make horrible faces."

"And supposing they were recovering from this, would they still go on making the faces when they were able to go about, and seemed quite well in all other respects," asked Mrs. Middleton, joining for the first time in the conversation.

"Hardly," said the Doctor. "They might occasionally make faces, but their manners would be very restless and fidgety; and they would be always on the move, and not able to keep still long after they had resumed the command of their facial muscles."

"Then," said Mabel, "there is no way in which *you* can account for a person with quiet, gentle, composed manners and ways, who seems in good health, suddenly making dreadful faces?"

"No way in the world, Miss Mabel, unless she does it for fun," replied the Doctor.

He and her mother soon after left the room, and then he again assured Mrs. Middleton there was nothing whatever seriously amiss.

"She has got something on her mind, she is worried and anxious, and that makes her nervous, and would very probably in time affect her health, but she is quite well at present."

While they were talking Mr. Middleton came into the room. His wife stepped from the window, where they were standing, to account to him for Dr. Philpotts' appearance, signing to the Doctor to remain concealed by the draperies of the curtain for the moment, that her husband might not be startled, but before she could speak the Rector began himself.

"The most extraordinary thing!" said he; "the oddest behaviour! I don't know what in the world to make of it. I have been having a long talk with Mr. Landon in my study; nothing could be more satisfactory, and I was greatly pleased with his generous intentions, and amiable way of expressing them. Then I was coming up to look for you, to see if we could not gratify him by fixing the day, and, turning round at the door to say a last word, I found he was standing there making faces at me, and pointing at me with his finger in the rudest way,"—here the Rector pointed with *his* finger, in imitation, just as poor Mabel had done—"and looking!—I declare to you, Ursula, he made me shudder; he looked more like a demon than a man.——My dear, are you ill? what's the matter?" For Mrs. Middleton had grown quite pale and hastily sat down. Dr. Philpotts came forward from his hiding-place.

"Making faces?" said he. "Why, that's what Miss Mabel was fussing herself about."

In a few words Mrs. Middleton explained what had happened, and all that Mabel had told her, but neither clergyman nor physician knew in the least what to make of it.

"Poor dear Mabel," said Mrs. Middleton, "how frightened she has been! What can we do? How can we do anything? And such a delightful marriage as it seemed, and I am growing quite fond of him myself—and I thought my darling was going to be so

*very* happy." Here she began to cry, and at the same moment Mabel, who had got up and dressed herself as soon as she was left alone, came into the room. They all felt startled, and looked at each other like guilty conspirators, while Mrs. Middleton hastily dried her tears.

"She's not a foolish child, but a sensible girl, with the whole happiness of her future life at stake," said her father after a moment's reflection, "and concealments are almost always unwise, so I shall tell her exactly what has happened." And he proceeded to repeat the fact of Mr. Landon's behaviour, without, however, any of the comments on it which he thought calculated to distress or alarm her still further.

Mabel got very white as she listened, but her manner was much more composed.

"It is not, then, anything in *me*," she said softly. "I sometimes almost persuaded myself that I had delusions, and I saw mamma thought I was ill."

"And now," said Mr. Middleton, "what would you wish to do?"

"I think," she said timidly, "we might just tell him plainly what we have seen, and find if he can in any way explain it,"—then she began to get agitated again—"but I am quite sure he can't, and I feel so afraid of him, that I don't think I *could* marry him."

"I will tell him, my dear, and say that you and we think it best that the engagement should be broken off, and then, if there *is* any explanation, he will give it fast enough."

At that moment the party were all startled by the very person whom they were speaking of entering the room. Mr. Landon himself sauntered in, his hands in his trousers pockets, a cheerful smile on his face, his air as pleasant and dégagé as ever. He was singing merrily, in his sweet tenor voice,

"And the beating of our own hearts
Was all the sound we heard."

But he stopped rather suddenly when he found the room full of people.

"I beg pardon," he said. "I hope I don't intrude. Mabel, how glad I am to see you up. You are better, then, are you?"

Mabel drew away as he approached her, turning red and white all in a minute, and seemed as if about to leave the room, but was detained by her mother, who put her arm round her waist.

"He has a claim to your presence, darling. I will take care of you, and papa will speak for you; but you must with your own lips confirm what is said; he has a right to demand it."

Meantime Dr. Philpotts quietly took his departure.

"Mr. Landon," said the Rector, "I am sorry that I have something very disagreeable to say to you."

"It will be the first disagreeable word I have heard in this house, sir," replied the young man, with his pleasant smile.

"You have frightened Mabel on several occasions by—by—" the Rector hesitated; he really did not know how to express himself.

"By what, my love?" cried Mr. Landon, turning to Mabel.

"Oh, you know," she exclaimed, in a breathless sort of way. "By those dreadful faces you were always making."

"Ah!" said he, and drew a long breath.

"I witnessed it myself this morning; but you have terrified my daughter several times. You have made hideous faces at her when her back was turned, and pointed at her in a mocking way."

The Rector made a movement to imitate the action, but his wife could not bear it, and gently kept down his hand with her own.

"The impression you have produced on her mind by this is extremely painful. Her acquaintance with you is very slight. She knows nothing of your former life, and can only guess at your character. The engagement between you was, perhaps, formed with undue haste, and she wishes it to be broken off."

"Not really?" said Mr. Landon.

"Yes. I am very sorry that things so unpleasant have occurred; but I don't wonder at her, and she acts with my full approval."

"And there goes my last chance," said he; "and it has so often happened before!"

"What! you have been engaged before?" said the Rector.

"And often?" said his wife.

"You dear people, don't be too hard upon me. You know I did not mean *that*."

"Perhaps," said Mr. Middleton, "you have some explanation to offer. You can account in some way for what you have done?"

"But first," replied he, earnestly, "are you quite sure I *did* do it? Might not you and she have fancied it? If there *is* any doubt, will you not give me the benefit of it?"

"What nonsense!" said Mr. Middleton; "as if you must not know yourself whether you did or did not do it."

"Well, yes, I must admit that is true," he said, reluctantly. Of course I must know." Then there was a little pause.

"Mamma, may I not go?" said Mabel, in a very low voice. He turned to her eagerly.

"Do you really not love me?" he said, earnestly. She hesitated, in extreme distress.

"I really don't know," she replied at last; "but you frighten me dreadfully. And I *could* not marry you unless there was an explanation."

"And how can there be an explanation?" asked Mrs. Middleton.

"I entirely agree with Mabel," said her father, "that the marriage could not take place unless you account for your extraordinary conduct."

"And even then," said Mrs. Middleton, "she shall not go to *any* part of Africa."

Mr. Landon looked from one to the other, as each in turn addressed him, and then fixed his eyes gloomily on the ground. Mabel made a half-suppressed little sound, and caught hold of her mother's arm.

"I see it; I see it coming into his face," she cried, and, shuddering, hid her eyes.

"You do *not*," he said, almost fiercely, turning towards her; "but you don't love me; you accepted me only for my money."

"Oh, mamma, what a thing to say to me!" cried poor Mabel; "as if *that* were possible."

"No, Mr. Landon, you are unjust there," said Mrs. Middleton, gently. "She is incapable of anything of the kind. She does love you, with the modest preference of a young girl who finds herself chosen by the man she thinks the most superior she has ever seen, and by this time would have felt all that a girl should feel for her lover, if fear had not driven away her affection."

Mr. Landon fixed on Mabel an anxious, longing gaze. "Well," he said at last, with something almost like a sob, though his eyes were dry, "if I explain?"

"We desire nothing better," said Mr. Middleton. "If you explain, and if Mabel is satisfied and feels that she can overlook the past—for her happiness is dearer to us than anything else, and we will not have her pressed nor her life saddened."

"I understand," he said. "I fully understand, and I *will* explain, but I cannot just at this moment; I am too much startled, and could not quite speak with the calmness necessary. But I will write, if you will let me go now; I will write an explanation, and I will return here in one week for my answer. I will do all I can; I will not hurry her. I will write a full explanation, and will give you all a week to consider of it."

Without another word to anybody, or another look at Mabel, he turned round and left the room and the house.

He did *not* return in a week; and to this day the explanation has not arrived.

Five years have passed away since Mr. Landon left the Parsonage into which he brought so much trouble and grief—five years have passed away, and Mabel Harvey is a happy wife. She has changed her name, but not to that of Landon.

Her first engagement could not be called a happy one, nor do I think she had more than that preference for Mr. Landon which ripens into love. Still the shock and grief had been severe, and she was years before she was able to attach herself again, which at last she did most thoroughly, to Mr. Harvey, her father's curate, who had loved her all through.

They had been married for more than a year when circumstances that I need not enumerate led them to visit a private lunatic asylum.

Mabel felt some shrinking fear when she entered the house, but as her husband *had* to pay the visit she made up her mind to accompany him. Dr. S—— showed them over the house, and the patients Mabel saw were so quiet and well-behaved that she began to feel quite comfortable among them.

"This is the library," Dr. S—— said, bringing them into a cheerful apartment, with books and magazines scattered about and half-a-dozen people reading in it.

One of these was busily studying a map, and as Dr. S—— passed him he cried out, "Well, Doctor, I have nearly made my way into the very centre of Africa."

Mabel started at the voice, but the man's head was bent over the map and his face concealed from her. They passed him and were leaving the room, when *something*, she did not know what, caused Mabel to look back over her shoulder. The man was standing up, but he was not standing still—his figure moved and wavered a little, reminding one of grotesque dancing, his eyes were fixed on Mabel, his face was twisted into horrible contortions, he was pointing at her with a long mocking finger. Her eyes met his. She screamed loudly, and then uttering the two words, "Mr. Landon," reeled and would have fallen fainting to the floor, if her husband had not caught her in his arms.

When she recovered her senses she was in the Doctor's private sitting-room, and he, in answer to her eager inquiries, told what he knew of Mr. Landon's history.

"It is his third visit to my home," he said, "and I fear he may now be put down as among the incurables. He knew this madness was coming on five years ago, poor fellow, and had sense enough to seek me of his own accord, and place himself in my hands. He knew it because he found he could not keep from making faces at people and indulging in strange dances when alone. He thought I should cure him again, but here he is still, and though harmless enough when not crossed, there is little hope of amendment."

"And he had been mad for years!" sighed Mabel.

"He was about fifteen when first brought to me, and I had him six years afterwards. That time I really believed him permanently cured. He travelled much, by my advice, and few of his friends knew that his mind had ever been affected. He was a clever man, and likely to distinguish himself, but that is all over now, and I greatly fear that the world outside my home have seen and heard the last of Mr. Landon."

# IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.

Freiburg.

FEW spots in the Black Forest are more romantically situated than Triberg. In the very heart of the district, it so should of right possess unusual qualities. Here tourists and travellers "most do congregate," and in a double stream of people form Perpetual Motion. The Schwarzwald Hotel is in a constant state of excitement from arrivals and departures, succeeding each other in endless procession; until at last, looking on at the constant ebb and flow one is tempted to exclaim:

"All the world's a stage
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances."

Everyone who visits the Black Forest visits Triberg, and most people make a somewhat longer stay here than at other places. For some reason or other it seems to be looked upon as a sort of haven, where for a time the onward rush, the craving for fresh fields and pastures new, may be laid aside—even if it be but for twenty-four hours. A certain calmness and repose takes possession of the spirit, and one yields to it without regret.

The scene from the Schwarzwald Hotel is enough to tempt anyone to linger. The heights, towering above the building, are a mass of pines, and nothing but pines, range above range, fringing the very outlines. In a cleft or crevice, down comes the rushing torrent in seven distinct falls, emptying themselves in self-made basins, where the water froths and boils and bubbles like a demon's cauldron. Great stones and rocks, moss grown, fern-fringed, twist and turn the water into fantastic forms and shapes. Looking upwards, on each side the chasm is wild and rugged with jagged rocks, zigzagged like a flash of petrified lightning, beautified by innumerable ferns that seek the shade. Delicate pine trees complete the picture, and make the Triberg waterfall perhaps the most romantic in the Black Forest, as it is said to be the most important in Western Germany.

Below the hotel lies the town, sleeping in the valley, surrounded by cultivated slopes that stretch upwards, and distant pine hills that close in the view. The town, thriving and industrious, is given up to straw-plaiting manufactories, abounds in woodcarvers and clock-makers, is full of shops exhibiting choice specimens of handiwork. If you wish to be tempted in this way, better be tempted here than elsewhere, for in the Triberg Gewerbehalle, or exhibition, will be found the best collection in all the Black Forest. Hundreds—it almost feels like thousands—of clocks, are ticking, striking, whirring, chiming all over the place, and your head soon whirrs in concert with the machinery. Whilst a cuckoo suddenly flutters out and excitedly announces with all the power of its lungs that it is ten in the morning, a little trumpeter opposite as suddenly stalks out of his niche, blows an unearthly discord, and announces six at night. Then a dozen cuckoos all strike up at once with the effect of a chromatic scale pressed down together—and you feel that Bedlam would be better than this.

But the exhibition is worth a visit, if only to hear the great mechanical organ at the further end of the room. Amongst its selection it plays the Overture to "Tannhäuser," with full band accompaniment, in a manner that quite puts to the blush the orchestra at Covent Garden. The manager politely hands you a chair; the eyes close; and under the influence of the wild, weird, magnificent composition, towns, exhibitions and noisy crowds sink out of sight in obedience to a magician's wand. Mountains and pine forests, with vast solitudes and gloomy depths take their place, and ring and re-echo with the wonderful music of "Tannhäuser." Suddenly, still in obedience to the wand, imagination sees a white, drooping figure clinging to a cross and a voice rises in supplication; a voice so perfect, so exquisitely pure and sweet, you know it can belong to only one singer—Albani. Then a rugged pathway opens, and you see the trembling figure toiling upwards in that last walk, at the end of which, her sacrifice complete, the world sees her no more.

Suddenly the music stops; the charm is broken; Albani's thrice-lovely voice fades in the depths of the woods; you are violently brought back to earth by the polite manager, who asks if he shall change the barrel for "Madame Angot." With horror overwhelmed you beat a retreat, and beg for no more music.

The Black Forest is famous for these mechanical organs—orchestrions, as they are called—and in some instances they are brought to great perfection. There is a shop close to the exhibition, bearing the name of Lamy Söhne, full of clocks and singing birds and orchestrions, where you may pass half an hour in a fairyland of surprises and all kinds of mechanical music. One morning I went in with an old lady and gentleman—the latter a grave dignitary of the Church of England.

"A very tiring place," said the old lady; "all up and down hill;

the only fault I find with the Black Forest. Couldn't they level it, my dear?"—to her husband—"or build viaducts or something? Or at the very least, couldn't they organize pony chaises all over the country—like those, you know, that we found so useful at Bournemouth last year?"

"Take a chair, my love," said the old gentleman sympathetically, without committing himself to an opinion. And he placed one for her, whilst the young man in the shop (whose jolly, good-natured face and broad grin delighted one to behold) wound up the orchestrion.

The old lady sat down somewhat heavily from sheer exhaustion, and immediately the chair struck up the lively air of "The Watch on the Rhine," with a decidedly martial influence upon its occupant. She sprang from her seat as if it had been a gridiron, and asked her husband reproachfully if he was amusing himself at her expense, and whether her age was not sufficient to secure her from practical joking.

"Dear me!" cried he, in amazement, looking at the offending chair as though he expected it to walk away of its own accord. "What a musical nation these Black Foresters are! It's music everywhere! The very chairs you sit down upon are full of it."

At this moment the orchestrion struck up a selection from "Don Giovanni," and the old lady recovered her amiability in listening to a really splendid instrument. I left them still enjoying it, marvelling at all the birds and boxes, and thinking each one more wonderful than another.

The waterfall drew one upwards as the pole draws the needle. The water roared and foamed in its course and threw around it spray in a manner almost too refreshing. On one of the rustic bridges, three German students tramping the country were enjoying the rushing water, when one of them, leaning too far over, dropped his hat into the seething pool. At this he appeared much afflicted, and for the first moment seemed inclined to jump in after it, though already swallowed up out of sight. But his companions persuaded him that as he certainly would not recover the hat, whilst he might possibly lose his life, the chances were scarcely worth the risk. His hair was wild, his face covered with scars—a common enough occurrence with German students, who seem to take to fighting, cutting and slashing as a necessary part of education. So giving up all idea of a plunge, the three went tumbling and whistling down hill, now breaking out into a few bars of a volkslied, now making the woods re-echo with shouts of laughter, in response to a remark from one or other—more or less humorous we will suppose.

"The loud laugh that speaks the vacant mind," as Goldsmith has it, may well have exception when three students are out for a holiday, revelling in life, youth and health, in the beauties of nature, the glorious, waving, whispering woods, the grand, free air, the blue skies, the floods of sunshine, the perfect, unrestrained liberty of the

hour; books, enemies, duels, all thrown to the winds. Day after day wandering at their own sweet will; rejoicing in youth and strength; the very lightness of the purse often, in some mysterious manner, contributing to their pleasures by making more uncertain the movements and future of each day. Laying up a store of memories for a time when such excursions will no longer be possible; when three fast friends bound by close ties, shall have widened the links and loosened the cords of friendship by the cruel force of time, chance and change.

Ah, what a happiness it all is—these golden, glowing days— if we only knew it, what a happiness! Perhaps because so fleeting.

> "There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
> When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay;
> 'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone which fades so fast,
> But the tender bloom of heart is gone ere youth itself be past."

Oh, let us make the most of our youth, our golden days. Make fast our friends, revel in our strength, lose no opportunities, leave as little as possible behind for regret. Rejoice, oh young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth. . . . but, as far as possible, put away evil and sorrow from thy flesh. Take thy pleasures to the full, give thanks for opportunities and capacities for enjoyment, so richly bestowed upon thee; but let them be tempered by innocency and uprightness, and so shalt thou be doubly blessed: blessed at the time, and blessed in the recollection. For remember that if the ways of thine heart and the light of thine eyes be not single, God, for all these things, will bring thee into judgment.

I took the place of the students on the bridge and watched the pouring water and seething foam, until their songs and laughter discreetly died into silence as they entered the public streets. Then on upwards through the wood, overshadowed by the pine trees, until at the end of a rugged climb, the path opened out upon a wide plain, an inn dedicated to the waterfall, a long, white, well-made road, the village and church spire of Schönach in the distance.

The open space, the free air, unchecked by surrounding mountains, was pleasant after the close confinement of Triberg; the long white road lured one insensibly onwards. The green grass and cultivated fields refreshed one by contrast with the sad forest gloom. So on and on, until at a rough, roadside bench I sat down to rest. Toiling up a steep little path, slowly came an old, old woman, wrinkled and curved; so ancient, she might have been Methuselah's widow. As she walked she plaited straw, and she stopped and spoke in a sort of patois German, and one had to guess at half her meaning. She said she was nearly ninety, had had a hard life, been many years a widow, and was waiting the time of her departure—it wouldn't be long now.

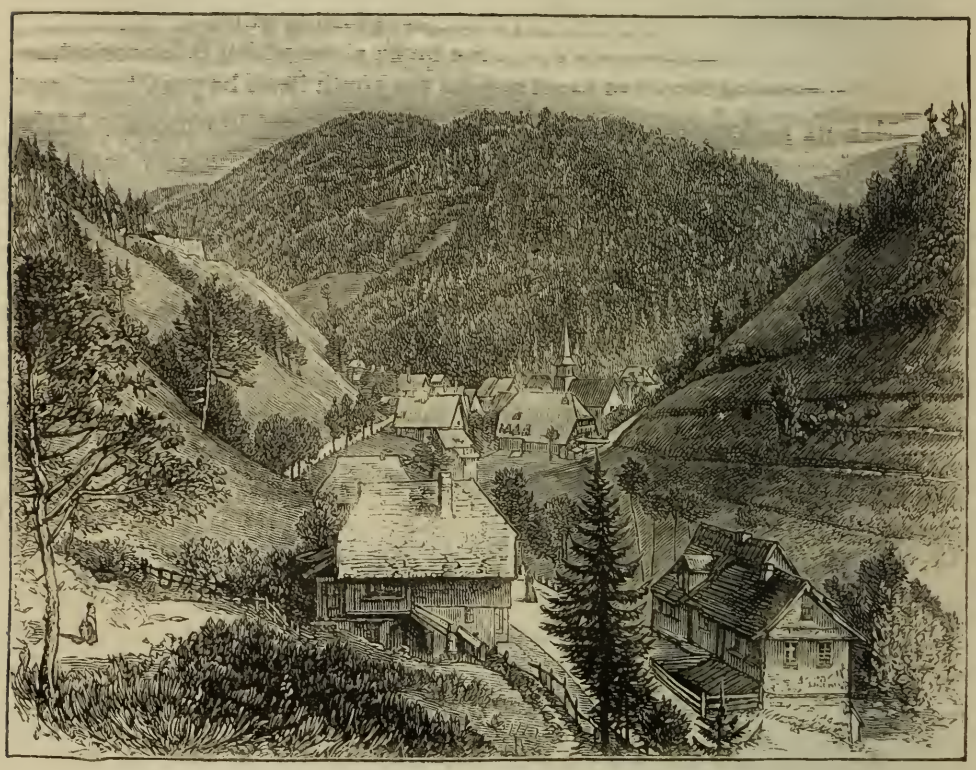
"How do you live!" I asked, wondering whether the village made provision for its old people in the form of doles or asylums.

"By this," she answered, holding out her straw, some portion of which was rolled up. "I plait this straw and sell it for hats, but plait as fast as I will, I can hardly do enough to buy my daily bread."

"Do you get no help from the parish?"

"No," she replied. "I have nothing given me except a trifle now and then from a neighbour. It has been weary work for me since I lost my husband, and that was fifty years ago."

She looked indeed as if, to her, life had been labour and toil, and she had eaten the bread of sorrows. She stood there the embodiment of antiquity; full of years, yet no doubt still clinging to



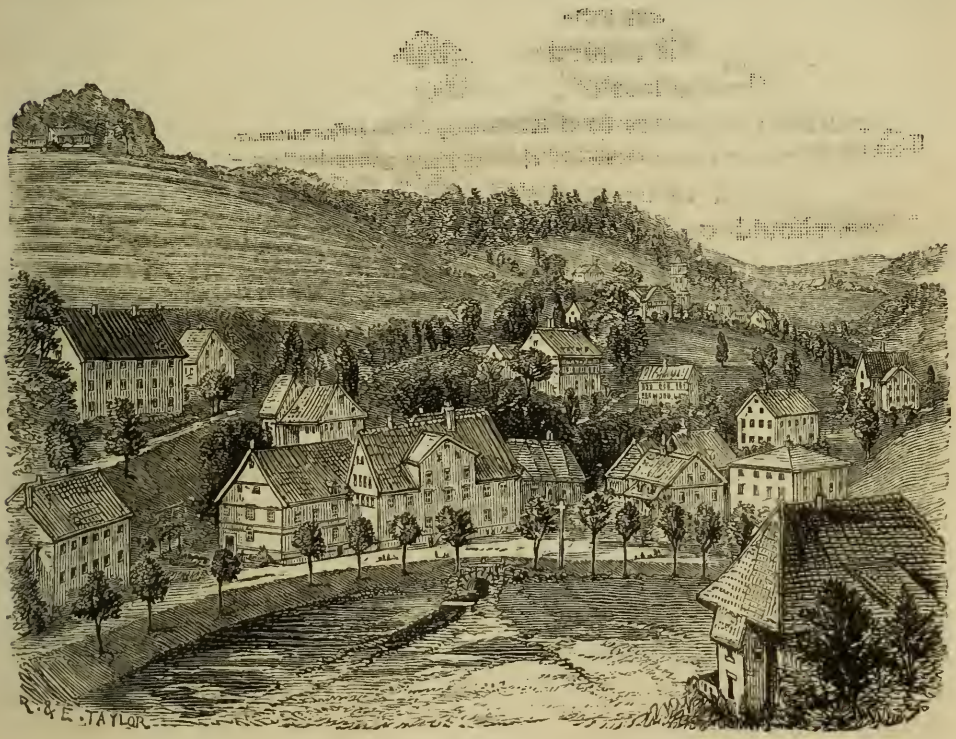
NUSSBACH, NEAR TRIBERG.

life, though for her it could yield neither pleasure nor profit. Beggars are rare in the Black Forest; it is a good trait amongst them; though it may be due to the strong arm of the law rather than to any special moral development. Beggars, I say, are rare, and this woman was not a mendicant; but as she stood enlarging upon her poverty and sorrows, it was evident that a trifling gift added to her day's earnings would be received without disfavour. A few halfpence would have called down a shower of blessings, and a departure amidst loud hallelujahs; but just to try the effect of a larger sum, I put into her hand a coin of the value of about a shilling.

The benedictions hovering about the lips were arrested. The old woman looked at the silver piece, then at the giver; then, overcome with emotion, found no words in which to express her thanks, and

turned away in silence. She went down the road with slow and tottering steps, a wonderful exhibition of the tenacity of life under adverse circumstances.

The road from this point wound round, and following in the old woman's footsteps, I soon found myself at the village, buried here in the lonely height, out of sight and sound of the world—even the small world of Triberg. A few scattered houses, a man wading in a blood-red pool, evidently used for dyeing purposes, an inn where the host and hostess sat at a small table at the further end of a big square room and looked as if they were hatching treason or meditating




GUTENBACH.

murder. The landlord was rough and surly, as he drew small (but refreshing) German beer for a few straggling wayfarers. I daresay it was all fancy, but had I slept there that night I should have barred and bolted my door before turning in.

A small church opposite, with a hideous interior, stood on slightly rising ground, and pointed its spire heavenwards. Amongst the simple graves scattered around, happy children, with the carelessness of youth, were playing at hide and seek, startling the sacred precinct with their shouts and gambols, troubled with small thought or respec for the dead. Children know nothing of death : for them the King of Terrors does not exist. But presently comes the age when youth budding into man and maidenhood, looks upon death with sentimental melancholy ; if it comes to them is in the nature of a sacrifice, and so they meet it bravely. Next, full manhood, when death seems too far

off and impossible even to be realized. Lastly, in age, looking forward, it seems to approach with slow and gradual steps; looking back, to have come with wings. Death is realized, but, happily, no longer as a King of Terrors.

Roads right and left beyond the village seemed to give promise of beauty; but I left them for others to explore, and turned back towards Triberg: skirted the wide plain with its depression, that looked as if it might once have been a lake; down once more amongst the overshadowing pines, beside the rushing waterfall, and on to the bridge where the student had lost his hat. That hat, no doubt, was lying at the bottom of the troubled pool; he and his companions were far away by this time; another hat purchased, for which probably he would pay by the loss of a dinner or two. For these students often calculate their expenses to a fraction, and neglect, with the happy disposition of their class, to put down any margin for contingencies.

There is much to be seen about Triberg. No one, reaching it by carriage, should omit to take train to Hornberg, one of the most beautiful and wonderful bits of railway travelling in existence. Magnificent views follow each other in rapid and breathless succession. Often the scene on either side is so grand you are puzzled which way to look; greedy of so many wonders you fear to lose the least. For once you quarrel with the speed of the train and wish it would crawl onwards. You may stand outside on the stage of the railway carriage, and literally hover over deep, glorious precipices, taking care that the guard does not pounce upon you in his perambulations.

Now the train winds far up the hills amongst the woods, over roads cut out of the solid rock; you look down upon slopes of pines into the valley beneath. There the stream is running fast, houses are scattered about, people are working in the fields—all is life, sunshine, and unimaginable beauty. Surely it was of such a scene that Montgomery wrote:—

> "If God hath made this world so fair,
> Where sin and death abound,
> How beautiful beyond compare
> Will Paradise be found!"

The line is intersected by innumerable small tunnels, and the train is constantly rushing out of momentary darkness into the full blaze of sunlight, and all the glories of the Black Forest, which culminate in the short railway journey between Hornberg and St. Georgen. You are above the tops of the pine-covered hills; can see beyond them into the depths of the skies; a great expanse of country lies around. The valley is far below, and men and women are dwarfed to Liliputians. As the train rushes on, you have a sensation of freedom, almost of flying, inexpressibly delicious. The beauties of the road are as nothing compared with these beauties of the line. There, after all, you are more or less on the dead level of the valley, and beautiful exceedingly as even that is, the grand feeling of expanse, of

soaring above the hills and the world, given by the railway, is absent. Now rushing round curves and sweeps, and passing from one chain to another, now crossing lofty viaducts and looking sheer down into the valley, you begin to wonder whether all this is reality or a dream from which you will presently awaken.

In returning I went on to Villingen, but the road beyond St. Georgen loses its beauty, and but for the quaint little town at the end, is not worth the journey.

Villingen is a small walled town of great antiquity, but many traces of its age have disappeared under the ravages of fire, &c., too often the case in most ancient towns. Down the long, straight street you might fire a cannon from one end to the other without fear of damage to life or limb. It has a few antiquated buildings; the gateways, an old church, and especially an old Rathhaus, with wonderful windows, and gurgoyles frightful in their grinning ugliness—but curious and interesting from extreme age. The edges are everywhere rounded and crumbling away. The circular stone staircase will scarce admit you upwards. You feel that if the town dates back to the year 800, this might well have been the palace of its first youth.

Hearing that it contained a museum of wonderful antiquities, mediæval rooms in good preservation, and gloomy dungeons which outrivalled those of the New Castle of Baden, I endeavoured to gain admittance. First I was directed to a sort of mayor of the town, whose permission was necessary. Arrived at his house, I found an old priest patiently ringing the door-bell, and obtaining no response. We pulled in turns; all in vain. The bell re-echoed through the upstairs corridors, followed by ominous silence. Not even ghostly footsteps responded to the appeals.

"Perhaps he is asleep," suggested the priest.

"Or he may be dead," I returned, by way of improvement, mindful of the laws of progression.

At this moment a door in the passage opened, and a tailor occupying the ground floor appeared on the scene.

"Neither one nor the other," cried he. "His highness" (I will not vouch for the exactness of the title) "has gone to a marriage at Donaueschingen, and will not be home for some time. If you pull the bell down you will get no other answer."

"But where's the wife?" demanded the baffled ecclesiastic.

"Oh, *she* always goes out on her own score when her husband's away," returned the tailor. "Makes it a holiday; looks up her friends; has dinner with one, supper with another; chatters away like a magpie; comes home two minutes before the train's due. Women are such frivolous things—think of nothing but dress and gossip and scandal."

The tone was so genuinely aggrieved, one could but see the tailor spoke feelingly upon the subject. It was very evident, poor fellow, that however much Mr. Tailor might make the garments that have passed into a proverb, Mrs. Tailor wore them.

The priest and I departed together—fellow sufferers at the hands of two persons contracting a marriage at Donaueschingen, which, perhaps, at the end of a month, no one would repent more than they, poor, deluded souls. The old priest went his way, I went mine; in search of the custodian of the museum of antiquities. He lived in a small house opposite the church and the Rathhaus, where his wife kept a milliner's shop—a quiet rendezvous for the Villingen ladies.

Fate was against me that day. The man had gone to Triberg, and the wife would as soon part with her life as with the key, to anyone but the mayor—and he, as we have seen, had gone off to a wedding. So, giving up the chase after the beautiful, the curious, and the

FREIBURG.

antique, I contented myself with a visit to the hospital. This, too, was a strange old place, beautiful in its age. Cloisters there were, with ancient, lovely Gothic windows and pillars, and walls with inscriptions and frescoes and portraits of dead-and-gone bishops and monks. But an air of sickness, disease and death lurked about the place; a subtle feeling of infection and danger; it was dull, gloomy, and not very clean: and the porter who opened the door was a nightmare in himself, poor fellow. A very short visit was more than enough, and I hurried out into the pure light, the free air of heaven.

Down near the station a river ran its course, clear as crystal. It literally swarmed with fish, and made one long for a little sport. That being out of the question, I sat me down on the bank and watched

their movements, and revelled in the cool, green grass, the bright sun and blue sky—all the beauties of this fair world; listened to the chirping of myriads of grasshoppers; and, to while away the time, indited a letter to a friend in command of one of Her Majesty's training brigs: who probably at that moment was cruising about the Channel, ordering the master-at-arms, with the assistance of the boatswain's mate, to administer wholesome castigation to a refractory youth. Or, if a storm was raging, putting in a word now and then to the boys drilling aloft; walking the decks, as good Lady W. firmly believed (a joke too good to be lost) with an umbrella over his head, to protect himself from showers that never came from the clouds.

OLD GATEWAY, FREIBURG.

My epistle, naturally, was dated *Villingen*, and he had the abomination to reply with an attempted pun: "Yours duly received from the town with the *Villingous* name."

At last I saw the train from Donaueschingen puffing along the line—perhaps bringing the truant mayor, whose absence had caused me the loss of the wonderful museum of antiquities. But were they so wonderful after all? I made up my mind, like the fox and the grapes, that they were unworthy a regret. So I gathered up my possessions, and prepared to migrate.

This town of Donaueschingen, eight miles from Villingen, is interesting as possessing, it is said, the source of the classic Danube. In the garden of the Prince of Fürstenberg is a round basin filled with crystal water. That water, for ever bubbling up, overflows, and is conducted by a subterranean passage into the Briegach—the river that, at Villingen, was so tantalizingly full of fish. From this point the Briegach takes the name of the Danube.

And what a wonderful course it follows thenceforth! What a glorious river it is, this "blue Danube." How picturesque and beautiful from Ratisbonn to Linz; how grand and wild right down from Linz to Vienna; with its rugged banks, its towering rocks, its grey, frowning chasms, its curves and rapids, its monasteries perched on the summits of wild precipices, looking into the dark, deep waters; its Valhalla, with its glittering, endless flight of steps: until, reaching Vienna, it sweeps past the gay capital, a proud, silent stream, wending its way onwards to the Black Sea.

To return to Villingen. The train puffed into the station, and erelong I found myself back in Triberg. In the interval of absence "men had come and men had gone;" there were new faces at the table d'hôte as well as old. The gathering was large, the dinner, as usual, a slow and solemn waste of time. Expressions of dissatisfaction at the hotel were often heard, but for my own part I saw little to complain of. The only nuisance was in the shape of a young Englishman, who every evening sat down to the piano in the reading-room—where a little silence and quiet was wanted after dinner to digest the latest newspaper—and for an hour would strum through a series of performances more or less extemporized, and more or less (chiefly more) annoying. It is an occasional wonder where some people acquire a certain courage, an absence of good feeling, of the consideration due to others' rights. This youth, night after night, was an unmitigated nuisance, yet would turn round at the end of his performance with a smile of benevolent satisfaction, the self-constituted hero of the evening.

The time came to say good-bye to Triberg. I left it early one morning by the diligence that started from the post office at seven, and was sufficiently lucky to get the one outside place next the postboy. These outside places are not to be secured beforehand in the Black Forest, and you can only make sure of them by being first in the field. Some diligences have one or two outside places, others have half a dozen.

It was a glorious morning and the sun already gave promise of a hot day. We swept up the steep road, lined with pine trees, with a speed that was slow and stately, in spite of the four horses, as lazy and contrary this morning as they could be. The postboy lost half his time in whipping them up with a very primitive weapon; and the lash, constantly coming into contact with the harness, demanded, every two minutes, a fresh supply of whip cord. This kind of thing is irritating, and the mystery was, how the postboy kept his temper, and with every diminishing yard of string grew more and more smiling and amiable.

But in time we found ourselves skirting the wide green plain above the waterfall, and galloping over the road where I had met Methuselah's widow. Sweeping round the curve in good form (the horses on the level road had become tractable) we soon came to a halt at the village post office. Here we took up the mail bags, and started off

again. The drive now opened up wide and extensive views. For the moment we had left the immediate neighbourhood of woods and forests, and seemed to have climbed above hills and valleys into other regions. The air was fresh and sparkling, though the heat of the sun was already tropical, and it was a question whether, after all, the inside passengers had not the best of the bargain. The view over long stretches of country, bounded by far-off, shadowy hills, was for the moment somewhat barren and uninteresting. One amiable old German excitedly put his head out of the window and pointed to the highest mountain in the Black Forest; but it was difficult to get up any enthusiasm for an elevation so distant that its outlines could scarcely be traced.

Small villages broke our journey into mild dissipations and varieties; road-side inns offered tempting refreshments to man and beast; an invitation the postboy never failed to make the most of; until at last we reached the quaint, picturesque village of Schönwald. It is a colony of watchmakers, and you might hear and see them at work in their factories and houses, standing in shirt-sleeves at their tables, singing in rhythm to the tap of their hammers, with windows open to the free air and blue sky. They looked cool, calm and happy, a perfect picture of contented life. Our arrival was the event of the morning—probably of the whole twenty-four hours; we gave out mail bags and took in others; a small crowd quickly flocked round us—to transfer their polite attention and ardent gaze to the post office, as soon as we were off again.

From Schönwald we still ascended, until, at the inn Zum Kreuz we reached the top of the pass, the summit of the hill Sommerau, and a height of 3,500 feet above the level of the sea. This spot forms the watershed between the Rhine and the Danube. Distant views met the eye; undulating plains, somewhat barren; the highest mountain still visible; far-off ranges of hills and forests, but no near object calling for attention. A great stretch of country without any special feature to recommend it or to cause emotion. It was difficult to agree with the amiable old German, who again put his head out of window and declared that he thought this one of the grandest views in the whole of the Black Forest.

Now descending a winding road—as the old lady had said in the Triberg music shop, the Black Forest is all up and down hill—we soon lost the barren prospect. Softer outlines surrounded us, hills verdant and gently sloping, rural scenery, broken and diversified. At length the church spire and houses of Furtwangen, reposing in a hollow, watered by a flowing stream, sloping hills stretching above and around the town for a great distance. Clattering down the steep hill, the diligence came to a stand at the post office; the postboy threw off the reins with an air that showed his sense of importance and responsibility, the mail bags were discharged, and the officials became immersed in the weighty duty of sorting letters. Those who came to

the window to ask a question were greeted with a look and a growl that hurried them away as effectually as if a loaded pistol had been pointed at them ; and the offence was not repeated.

Furtwangen is given up to industry. Its inhabitants all look, in a quiet way, as if, for them, the "pleasures of idleness" had no attractions. Watch and clock manufactories abound; much wood-carving; and here some of the best orchestrions are made, and exported to all parts of the globe. One maker said that he sent many to Russia, America, and even the Colonies, which alone gave sufficient occupation for all the resources at his disposal. There is an exhibition here also, but it is very inferior to that of Triberg.

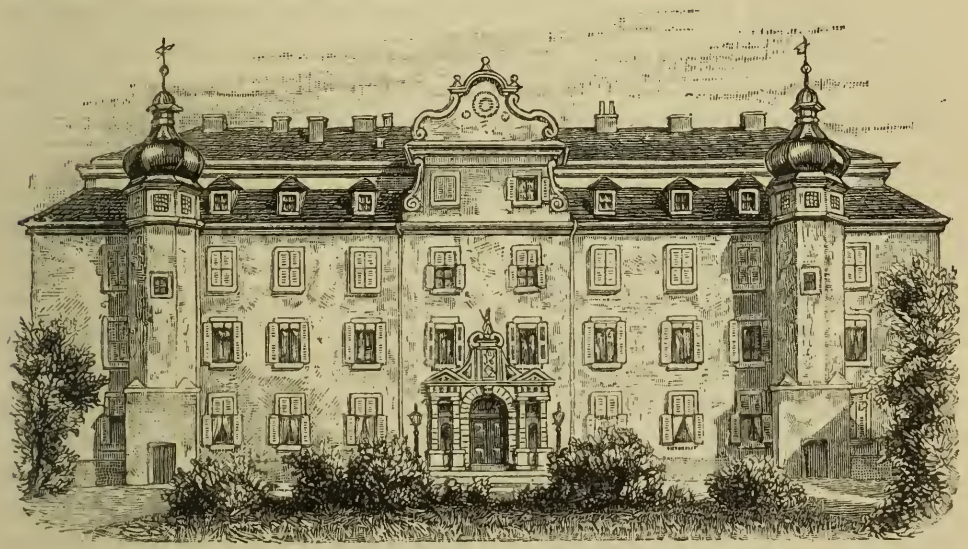
From many of the windows you might see—as we had seen at Schönwald—men at work in their sleeves; carving, making clock-works, putting them together; all so busy and cheerful, looking so cool and happy as they sang at their work, whilst we were blazing in the outside sunshine, one almost felt inclined to envy the even tenor of their lives. In one of these houses lived the youth whose broad, jolly, good-natured face had so "fetched" me at the music shop at Triberg. He and his father divided their time, in turns, between Triberg and their factory, just outside Furtwangen. I had promised the son that I would look him up at Furtwangen, and he should take me over the factory. But to-day, as chance would have it, both father and son were absent. All I saw, in an upper room, was the comely mother, surrounded by cages of mechanical singing birds, now silent; ladling out steaming soup at a round table, to an army of little hungry open mouths, by no means as silent as the birds. She was distressed at the absence of both husband and son—a rare occurrence; and I could only promise to repeat the visit if ever opportunity arose. In her hospitable impulse, she would have pressed some of the steaming soup upon me, and seemed distressed that I would not walk away with half a dozen of the bird-cages—payment was not in the least necessary. I saw at once that the good woman had transmitted her nature to the son, and even with interest.

So declining the soup and the bird-cages, I went quietly back down hill, wondering if ever before there had been so hot a day. The white roads seemed to glow like a furnace, and there was no shade anywhere. And Furtwangen, though picturesquely situated amidst the sloping hills, had little in the form of antiquity to attract attention, beyond a row of quaint houses and shops with dark, gabled roofs, that did their best to enliven the banks of the little river Briege.

After a halt of two hours or more, we were once more ready for departure. The new diligence proved accommodating. There were outside seats for half a dozen passengers, and therefore room enough and to spare for all. We started with four strong horses, and a post-boy who had grown grey and old and fat in the service, and knew how to drive. And how he did drive! Ascending for some distance, then crossing a mountain pass, presently a full view of the glorious

Simonsthal burst upon everyone's astonished and enraptured vision. This descent into the valley was perhaps the grandest, most sublime bit of travelling, yielding the most vivid impressions, of all I saw in the Black Forest.

From a great wooded height, we gazed far down into a long, wide, cultivated vale. The opposite hills were high and diversified. Slopes, now great stretches of forest, now fields and orchards, now barren and rugged, seemed to spread before one in endless succession. But the general impression was that of a valley fertile and picturesque in the highest degree; a smiling garden of immense extent. Now we passed through cuttings in the woods, and now in short zigzag roads dashed downwards; so near the edge of the slopes, and with such speed, turning the sharp angles so rapidly, that it required faith in one's coachman to preserve a calm exterior.



ST. MARGHERITA.

Down we went, glorious woods and fields around us; a stream running through the valley; a cataract tumbling from the very summit of the opposite hills; houses and villages perched so far above the world, it seemed as a nightmare or a dream to reach them. At last our zigzag descent gave place to a long level road, shaded by trees. Splendid chestnuts grew in abundance, rich apples and luscious plums. Bowling along, we had only to put out the hand and grasp the fruit.

The sun shone fiercely overhead, throwing light and shadows upon the landscape; the skies wore a celestial blue only seen on such days and in spots so lovely; the air came laden with scent as we galloped along; now a plum or an apple was gathered from a tempting overhanging branch. They grew in myriads, these plums and apples. It seemed that we were in fairyland, and here certainly was food for Paradise. It was all too beautiful; one of the loveliest days of

the world, gilding one of the loveliest spots of earth. A day and a drive to be remembered.

After awhile we came to the first break in our journey, with a ten minutes' halt for rest and a change of horses. And here, too, alas, we also changed our postboy. A small primitive village, where people were threshing or beating grain; curious signs outside the bakers' shops; the windows of many a small cottage adorned with flowers and vines. Finally, a little church brought one to the end of the village—and the end of life.

But the day was too glorious and sunny for meditative thought, and we started onward with fresh horses and fresh spirit. The road gradually assumed more of life and animation. Quaint villages now and then varied the scene; the great beauty of the valley had given place to a wider plain, fields and distant ranges; until at length, passing a factory or two, we entered the straggling, beautifully situated town of Waldkirch, surrounded by romantic hills and heights, forest-crowned, ruin-crowned. On all sides were wooded slopes and grand undulations, which make of Waldkirch one of the most picturesque spots in the Black Forest.

Under the shadow of one of the hills there stood the hotel and pension of St. Margherita. I had meant to push on that night by train to Freiburg; but falling in love with the situation of the house, with the house itself, with the romantic beauty of Waldkirch and its whole surroundings, it was impossible to leave. Even then the sun was sinking behind the hills in a haze of glory, flecking the sky with bright cloudlets that every moment changed colour, and completed the setting of the beautiful picture. In the gathering twilight the outlines of the hills grew soft and dark, the ruin-crowned height before us was fading into mystery. A sunrise in the morning from this spot would be something never to be forgotten. Therefore, unable to leave, I stayed.

The house itself had much to do with this remaining. A large, rambling building, with great rooms, and immense corridors, and wide, old, carved staircases. Ages ago it had been a monastery or nunnery, I forget which. Year after year, age after age, nuns had walked these corridors like spectres from another world: and, silently as spectres, must have stolen across to the quaint old church adjoining. Or perhaps—who knows?—there may have been an underground passage connecting the monastery with the sacred edifice.

The very sensation of sleeping in this wonderful old house was almost enough to bring one to Waldkirch: certainly enough to detain one when there. And when darkness had fallen, the great gloomy corridors were peopled with a whole army of nuns. From every doorway seemed to issue a veiled and hooded figure.

But modern innovations had crept in. Gardens and vineyards, and lovely children playing about, making the old place ring again with their happy careless laughter. Many people were staying in the house, and these children were amongst them. They were visions

of beauty, in harmony with the surrounding scenery—the mother herself perhaps the loveliest and most distracting vision of all.

When the shades of night had fallen, and all surrounding nature was shut out in the deep silence and mystery of darkness, for want of better occupation I strolled through the town. The inhabitants were taking their ease at their doors. Young men and women patrolled the streets in wide links, arm in arm, making the most of youth, liberty and happiness. Oil lamps were quaintly strung across the streets, in pristine fashion, just as we may see them in some of our rare country places, where the modern misery of gas has not yet penetrated. It all seemed very unworldlike. As regards feelings and impressions, one might have been a thousand miles away from a civilized capital. Above and beyond the houses and the precincts of the town, a black line stretched itself, yet more dense than the starry heaven immediately above; and there, one knew, were the silent woods, long stretches of darkness, where the trees whispered to each other in a language unknown to man. But in the town, by contrast, there was light and life and animation. Gradually, even there it subsided. Lights were put out; songs and choruses ceased; youth and age disappeared; shutters were swung to and bolted; the streets were left to the night and the stars and the benediction of the skies.

I, too, went my way. Entered the great silent house; with a solitary light that threw ghostly shadows, threaded the great wide staircase, and long, deserted passages. In every corner lurked a nun; every door was opening, to send forth a silent, hooded, sable figure, as it seemed to the imagination, excited by the darkness and the influence of the past upon these places. But whoever or whatever lurked there, they came and went with the silence of death: and the ghosts that flitted about cast no shadows.

Alas for the sunrise of the next morning! The glories of the previous day had culminated in a supernatural effort. I woke to the melancholy music of a downpour that might have heralded a second deluge. Ruins, hills, undulations, wooded slopes, all the beauty and romance of Waldkirch—everything was buried in a wet, vapoury mist that mingled with the torrent from the clouds. A change indeed, sad and disappointing, but like much of life, inevitable. It had to be borne.

Breakfast over, and in company with a porter, conveying my luggage in a sort of covered baker's cart, I waded through torrents to the station. Erelong the train was making way through all the lovely and picturesque scenery, spoilt and blurred this morning by rain and mist. Then, in due time, it stopped at the quaint, picturesque, old-world town of Freiburg, with its ancient towers, its vineyards, wooded slopes, and ruin-crowned heights: and above all, its beautiful cathedral, full of grace, harmony, and just proportions, with its lovely open spire, and a surrounding view from its belfry that, once seen, is seen for ever.

## A NIGHT OF DISASTER.

IT was in all the rush and excitement of the last "Exposition Universelle," at Paris, that a young Englishman was finding it rather slow in his spacious apartments in the Rue Royale. For one thing, he knew hardly a soul in that gay metropolis, and the few souls that he did know were away enjoying their summer holidays. You will ask why Bertram Wilde, the Englishman in question, stayed in Paris. The answer is that he was obliged to do so; or, if not really obliged, he thought he was, which comes to the same thing for all practical purposes.

He was about twenty-five years old, and the son of a country gentleman down in well-wooded Hampshire. His father had wanted him to "enter the Church," but wilful Bertram had expressed himself decidedly averse to the idea. As a matter of fact, there was not the least reason—pecuniarily speaking—why young Wilde should engage in any calling or profession at all; but he was luckily saved from idleness by his own native indisposition to rust and go to seed and do nothing.

Well, here he was, settled in Paris, experiencing a mixture of sensations, in which the sense of loneliness and a desire to fly away were perhaps predominant. He had tried going out and amusing himself, but he found that theatres, concerts, public balls, the exhibition itself and all its concomitant attractions simply made him more distressed than before. Neither the porte d'entrée of the Palace on the Champs de Mars, nor the foyer of the Opera House could attract him. Pleasure-seeking without a companion is always a dreary business, and at that period there was one companion, and she only, whose presence he longed for, and she was far away. So he did his work, as much of it as he felt inclined for, during the day, and moped and gave himself up to his own thoughts at other times.

But he was not entirely melancholy; far from it. Rather he was in that state of subdued excitement arising from being drawn in two different directions at the same time. A very strong attraction was pulling him in the direction of Antibes and the shores of the Mediterranean. Can you doubt what that attraction was? Bertram Wilde was a lover, and an accepted lover, and at that delightful French watering-place of Antibes, where even winter strikes with no icy blast, but the blue tideless sea shines warm and bright in mid-December, there was a young English girl looking out for him, and keeping up an exceedingly lively correspondence with the Rue Royale in the interval before he made his appearance. And now you can understand why time hung heavily on Bertie Wilde's hands, and why

he chafed and fretted under the restraint and loneliness of his solitary chambers.

Why did he not run down to Antibes? Simply because he had devoted himself with all the passion of an inexperienced amateur to the cause of art: he had taken it up as his profession, intending to stick to it, and he had been living in Paris for more than a year and working studiously in order to get on in his new calling. And he had got on very well; one or two of his pictures had appeared at the Salon, and one or two others had been hung in the rooms of the "Société Générale des Beaux Arts." What was keeping him in Paris in those sultry August days of 1878 was just the fact that he had been given a commission to execute a painting of a battle scene in the Vendéean war, by a rich Burgundian patriot, and he had felt it his duty to stay in his studio and finish it before rushing down to the place where pleasure and inclination both called him—the sandy bay of Antibes.

The English season at Antibes is the winter-time, while the French season is the summer. The Spaniards come pretty regularly both summer and winter, to enjoy this smaller "queen of Mediterranean watering-places." Bertie Wilde's first visit to the place had been in the winter of 1877, and it was then that he met, saw, and was conquered by Miss Helen Graham, who was living with her family in a villa some miles from the town and close to the sea.

Up to this time his courtship had run smoother than it had any right to do, as he had been happily betrothed with the full consent of Helen's parents within a few weeks of first seeing her. It is true, there were other aspirants to her hand. Two Englishmen had gone half demented with admiration for her before Wilde appeared on the scene; but they had been repulsed with severe loss, and had disappeared. Then a young Spaniard, Señor Basil Garcia, of the bluest Castilian blood, was—Bertie knew—in love with her, and had not by any means relinquished his attentions at the time of which I am writing.

As an accepted lover, he could of course snap his fingers at other suitors; all the same, there were times when Bertie, knowing the fiery Spanish nature, and having special reasons to distrust Señor Basil, felt certain uncomfortable misgivings. Not for himself; he was as bold as a lion; but who knew what vengeance disappointed love, working in a fierce southern heart, might not possibly be led to wreak on another a good deal dearer to him than himself? But such thoughts Bertie always dismissed as too dreadful: after all, there was law in France, and the Spaniard was a civilized being, who would not be likely to adopt desperate measures, and get himself guillotined for his pains.

It so happened that mischief-making Fate had brought Wilde and Señor Garcia into hostile contact with each other, quite apart from any question with regard to Helen Graham. And this was how it occurred.

There is—or was—a flourishing English club at Antibes, numbering in all about three hundred members. When Bertram Wilde was wintering at that place, he was asked to act temporarily as secretary, not a very onerous post. The real secretary was away for two months. Bertie yielded with his usual good humour, and acted in his official capacity to the satisfaction of the little English community of voluntary exiles gathered at Antibes in the December of 1877.

But, as luck would have it, his lot fell on unquiet times. The English club was not entirely confined to British subjects, as several French and Spanish gentlemen, and even ladies, were admitted as honorary members. A certain member of the old French aristocracy, Comtesse de Perpignan, took it into her head that she would like to be enrolled as honorary associate of this same club. So she was "put up" for election by two obliging friends among the English community, and in due course was balloted for.

Alas! for the little reverence paid to rank in these levelling days. Two black-balls were discovered in the box, and these two black-balls were sufficient to exclude the Comtesse de Perpignan. On inquiry it turned out that there was some method in the madness of the ungallant gentlemen who had voted against the Countess; there had been a scandal a long time before in Parisian society, which had forced her to leave the centre of French fashion and gaiety "under a cloud." The fact was that the Countess's husband had died in a mysterious and sudden manner, and suspicion had chosen to accuse the wife of having poisoned him. The suspicion never got so far as a court of law, but the Countess had thought it prudent to live away from Paris afterwards. This story had been got hold of by some members of the English club, who thereupon felt bound to exclude her from the untainted atmosphere of its salons.

The Countess was indignant. She was an elderly dame, and had given great entertainments to the English visitors, a grand bal masqué among the number, and she naturally resented the affront. Señor Garcia was one of her intimate friends, and he took steps to carry her resentment into some practical shape. Not knowing who the actual persons were who had black-balled the Countess, all he could do was to call on the secretary of the club—at that time Bertie Wilde—and very politely challenge him to a duel.

"What!" said Bertie, in perfect surprise at the idea; "you want to call me out, because somebody else has insulted somebody who is a friend of yours."

"Señor," loftily replied the Spaniard, who, unlike most of his countrymen, spoke excellent English, "an affront to the Countess is an affront to me. There is nobody else I can appeal to for satisfaction but the president of this club. Alas! there is no president; so I must come to the secretary—to you," with a profound bow.

"And what if I refuse to come out when you call me out?" asked Bertie, blandly.

Refuse! The idea had not occurred to the foreigner. Refuse to fight a duel! Such poltroonery was unimaginable. Yet Bertie did refuse, and was of course backed up in his refusal by all the English members of the club, who made the quarrel with the Spaniard their own. Finally, he was obliged to satisfy himself with the remark that "It must be an English custom, then, this insulting a lady and refusing to give satisfaction"—a remark for which Bertie felt strongly inclined to kick him down the stone steps of the club. Señor Garcia went away with an ugly look in his eyes.

All this happened before the time that Wilde made the acquaintance of Helen Graham, and therefore before he and Señor Basil Garcia were, or could possibly be considered, rivals in love matters. But it was an unfortunate thing that luck should have made them enemies before there was any real cause for it. All that actually came of the black-balling affair at the time was that Garcia scowled at young Wilde whenever he happened to meet him, and Bertie, for about a month after the challenge, carried a revolver in his pocket.

At about nine o'clock on the night of one of these same hot August days of 1878, Bertie was seated in his studio. The apartment was elaborately and artistically decorated, but as a general rule he did not patronise this room except when he was actually painting. Opening out of the studio was a nicely-furnished sitting-room, and this was his usual habitat. However, to-night he was ensconced in an easy-chair in the studio, and was rather astonished when the pretty little femme-de-chambre appeared, and announced that a gentleman was below and "requested the honour of an interview with Mr. Wilde."

"Ask him to send up his card," said Bertie, and wondered which of his friends, or what begging impostor, would call on him at that hour.

Before the order could be executed, however, the visitor had stepped quickly and lightly into the room, had waved his hand loftily to dismiss the little chambermaid, and closed the door after her himself. Then he turned to Wilde. His "get-up" was faultless, from top hat and cane held in his gloved left hand, to curled moustache and glossy-silk cravat; and he was smiling blandly.

It was Garcia. Luckily for Bertie, his nonchalant nature prevented him starting or showing any lively marks of surprise. He rose from his seat, feeling—it must be confessed—a little uncomfortable, and, motioning to a chair, begged his visitor to be seated. But Garcia remained standing, and still smiling; so Wilde stood also.

"Señor will excuse the liberty," began the Spaniard; "but I have a message, a letter, which I was requested to deliver to your hands, with my own. That is the reason of my venturing to intrude at this time." Then, as Bertie simply started—"Señor is surprised?"

"Excuse me," said Bertie, recollecting himself, "do sit down; you are quite welcome—at least," he went on, remembering the unpleasant incident connected with the balloting, the challenge, and the

rivalry for Helen, and feeling bound to speak forcibly, "you must be aware, señor, that I cannot forget ——"

But Señor Garcia interrupted him. "All that is gone, as far as is in my power to obliterate the past. I beg you will let bygones be bygones. I have come here on a friendly mission. May I trust that señor will receive me as a friend?"

"Willingly," said Bertie; but he still felt, in spite of himself, suspicious of this fair-spoken rival who had wished to make a target of him, and who now had such excellent additional reasons for bearing him ill-will.

Then Garcia disclosed his mission. He was the bearer of a letter from the Countess, in which that aristocratic and insulted lady played a most Christian and forgiving part. She had heard—so she wrote—of the unhappy quarrel between Señor Garcia, one of her best friends, and Monsieur Wilde, the distinguished English gentleman and artist. She could not allow herself—though she still felt deeply the affront put upon her by some obscure member of the Antibes Club—to be a source of enmity, and—alas!—perhaps even duels, between two such gentlemen, and she begged to assure M. Wilde that she had no knowledge of the challenge till a few days ago. She had at once begged Señor Garcia to drop the matter, as far as she was concerned, and she should be happy if she could be the means of reconciling two persons so well worthy of her esteem and of mutual friendship; and she begged to subscribe herself, &c., &c.

What was Bertie to think of this strange missive? What was the Countess to him, or he to the Countess? "Deuce take it," he thought to himself, "does she think I'm going to prosecute her for poisoning her husband?" But he obviously had nothing to do now but to accept the missive in the spirit in which it was, or appeared to be, written. So he assured Señor Garcia that he had never felt any unfriendly feelings, and that he would hope to answer the Countess's letter in a manner worthy of so agreeable a communication. Meanwhile, he begged Garcia to convey to her his sentiments of respect, &c., &c.

Garcia was bland politeness itself. He was charmed, enchanted, ravished. So would the Countess be. No, he could not stop, with a thousand thanks to Monsieur for his politeness. He was engaged to the reception of the Spanish Ambassador. He must go at once. When should he have the pleasure of seeing M. Wilde at Antibes again?

And he stroked his moustache with his jewelled fingers—for his right hand was without a glove.

"I shall be going down," said Bertie, carelessly, "on Tuesday week, by the night train. I am expected then at ——" He stopped, and hesitated.

The Spaniard helped him out. "At the Château Y——, doubtless?" he observed, smiling still.

"At the Château Y——," replied Bertie, with some hauteur. If the Spaniard chose to begin a conversation about Helen it was his own fault. *He*, Bertie, had no reason to shirk it.

"And—Monsieur Wilde will excuse my asking—Monsieur Wilde is then about to marry 'la belle Anglaise'? Is it not true?"

"Certainly, it is quite true," said Bertie, and then he thought to himself, "So that was the object of your visit, Señor Garcia, was it? You might have found *that* out without coming here." His distrust of the suave Spaniard had returned in full force.

"I congratulate you on your good fortune," Garcia said. "But I am detaining Monsieur. I have been delighted to have the pleasure of seeing Monsieur, of being the recipient of his distinguished messages, of having made a reconciliation with one so worthy of respect. A beautiful landscape that! After Eugéne Delacroix, is it not?"

And, with what Mr. Tennyson has called "haughty Spanish grace," he finally bowed himself out, and down the stairs, and disappeared.

"I expect I shall have to carry that revolver again," remarked Bertie to himself, thoughtfully.

On the Tuesday week he set out for Antibes, as he had told Garcia he intended doing.

But the night before leaving Paris he dreamt a dream. He could not get to sleep till early morning, and when he slept his brain was haunted by strange imaginings. He was on a wide sea, in a little boat, and no shore was to be seen as far as eye could reach. Who was in the boat with him? He could not tell. All he knew was that a tempest was raging, that the wind howled and the breakers dashed over the frail bulwark, and every moment he expected the rapidly-filling bark to sink beneath the waves. Yet it did not sink, but seemed to ride the billows by some supernatural power. In the bows there sat a figure, the figure of a woman, but the face he could not see. For some reason he felt convinced it was Helen, his own Helen, and he tried to call her name, but he could not, and then he rose to move towards her, but he was chained to his seat, and, struggle as he might, he could not change his position. And all this time the wind and the waves were rising higher and higher, till at last a breaker came towering with crest of angry foam just over the frail bark, and as it broke on the boat he heard the figure give a despairing cry, and then it was washed overboard. And he too tried to shriek, but could not utter a sound. Then he tried to leap towards her, but he was unable to move. And as the figure—the face still hidden, but he had no doubt who it was—floated for a moment on the wave, what was his horror to see a hand, white and jewelled, rise out of the sea, and clasp the figure, and drag it down! Even in that moment of agony he seemed to have time distinctly to observe that hand—a peculiar, yet somehow familiar hand, very

white, but with large veins standing out on it, and to notice the exact nature of the ring on the finger—gold, with alternate rubies and diamonds. And then the agony was too great, and he awoke!

He could sleep no more that night. He rose, dressed himself, completed his packing, and set himself down to read a book. "Surely my nerves are out of order," he said to himself; "*was* that Helen in the boat?" and then he became angry with himself for thinking of his dream. "What superstitious folly! She will laugh to-night when I tell her. Shall I tell her? No, it might possibly frighten her. Thank Heaven, she is not given to idle superstitious terrors. Nor am I generally. What a peculiar hand! Where have I seen it before? And that ring—I could recognise that again anywhere."

Directly daylight came—and how slow it was in coming!—Bertram took up his painting materials and set to work for an hour or two before breakfast. By this means he succeeded in quieting his imagination, and by the time breakfast was ready he was able to take a more tranquil view of things.

That evening he was travelling through the flat and desolate country that lies between Marseilles and Antibes, where the railway runs, now close to the shore of the Mediterranean and now diverging inland for some way among the stony plains and stunted trees of the Department of the Var. Was he happy? I can hardly say. He was soon to meet his beloved after a separation of months. He was looking forward with all a lover's longing to the meeting, and yet he was more excited than happy. Somehow or other, the thought of that disturbing nightmare would cross his brain, and at Toulon, where tickets were demanded from the travellers, he found himself carefully observing the conductor's hands, to see if they bore resemblance to those of the dream. Again he felt vexed at his own folly, yet, as the train sped onwards through the darkness towards his destination, he became more and more uneasy.

"Thank Heaven!" at last he exclaimed. He was the only passenger in his first-class compartment, and he had seen the lights of a little town which he knew was only a few miles from Antibes. The train dashed past it, and was once again buried in fields. Then it emerged on to a high embankment skirting the sea, which served both as a railway viaduct and as a dyke to keep off the storm-waters from the land.

This was a point he had been waiting for. Antibes was not five miles ahead now, and from this lofty embankment he knew the Château Y—— was visible, where Helen was waiting for him, and looking—must she not be?—for the line of moving light which bore her lover onwards to her embrace.

He had risen from his seat, and was standing against the window, peering anxiously out into the night. It had begun to rain, and the wind was rising. The train made a slight lurch, and he steadied him-

self against the carriage-seat for a moment with his hand. Before he could look out again, the carriage gave a violent jolt, which threw him to the floor; and ere he could do anything to recover his position, or even realise what had happened, the whole solid framework had tilted bodily over to the left and plunged down the embankment.

Even while the carriage was taking its fatal plunge headlong, Wilde had time to think, "What will Helen do if I am killed?" and there his thoughts ended, for he was buried beneath a pile of wreckage that rose twenty feet above him in the air.

But he was not killed. It was a miracle that he was not, but all the mischief that had befallen him was that he was stunned for a few minutes. When he came to he found a stranger lifting him out of the wreck, and saying,

"Il n'est pas mort, pauvre jeune homme—il n'est pas mort!"

"No, I am certainly not dead," said Bertram, and he tried to lift himself up. He was badly bruised, and had an ugly wound on his head. Other injuries he had none. Soon he set to work to help in extricating other passengers who had fared less fortunately. The smash was a complete one. Engine, tender, and carriages lay thirty feet below the line, broken and twisted into every conceivable shape. Luckily there were but few travellers, and when the worst cases had been attended to, and the sufferers taken to a neighbouring cottage, nothing remained to be done. What was there to do? Ah! news of the catastrophe would be certain to fly quickly, and Helen would hear of it. He would spare her any possible anxiety on his account. He would carry the first tidings himself. Then he remembered that he had been looking out to try and see the Château Y——, where his betrothed and her family resided, at the very moment of the crash. Yes, he was not far off. How fortunate that the accident should happen just then! Only a mile separated him from her house. He could go across country, and could hardly miss his way. So, forgetting his wounds, Bertram Wilde set out.

The rain was coming down now and obscured all objects. Never mind, he knew the direction pretty well. "How surprised they will be to see me so soon; and in such a state!" he thought. Just then he plunged into a narrow ditch separating two fields, and went up to his knees in water. It was not deep, and he soon waded across, and began striking over some stony soil, gradually rising. When he got to the top, he looked about for a few moments. Yes, he was going right, he thought. Was the sky getting brighter? Perhaps it was clearing up. No, the rain still beat down persistently. "I shan't mind a wetting after such an accident as that," said Bertram to himself; and now he passed under some trees, and came to a wall, leapt it, and found himself in a road. It led in the right direction, and thanking his stars, he began to move forward.

But the sky *was* getting brighter. He could see it through the

heavy boughs overhanging the path, and there was certainly a glow which he had not seen before. He walked a little now, and the light got brighter. Then it became more radiant, and he could see distinct pulsations of red blaze rising and falling on the midnight curtain of clouds. What did it mean? An Aurora? Not in these latitudes, on such a night. What was it? With quickly-beating heart he hastened on.

Another moment, and he was in view of, and close to the house that held what was dearest to him on earth. What a sight! Was he dreaming? Was this the effect of the accident upon his too highly-strained nerves? No. The villa was on fire, from basement to roof one flaming framework; windows, floors, and walls sending columns of nearly smokeless fire up to the sky, as only houses can do that have quantities of well-seasoned wood about them.

There was a beautiful creeper, a clematis, that used to hang in festoons over the porch, and there it was hanging still, charred and shrivelling in the fierce heat. That creeper had been watered every day by Helen's own hand. Where was *she* now? Pray Heaven, not within! He set off, with his heart throbbing against his ribs, at race-horse speed for the house.

Somebody was standing on the lawn in front of it. Bertie rushed across the soppy, fire-illumined turf towards him. It was old Mr. Graham, Helen's father. I call him old, though in reality he was not more than sixty years; but he was prematurely aged, being a complete invalid, and had come abroad to the southern coast for the sake of his health. He was stooping down, trying with frantic impatience to raise a heavy ladder that lay along the ground; but evidently the task was too much for his feeble strength.

"Mr. Graham!" half shouted Bertram, as he dashed up to him.

"Wilde!" and Mr. Graham clasped his hands, and ejaculated "Thank Heaven! you are come. Helen!"

That name was enough for Bertie. He guessed all. Quick as lightning he had raised the ponderous ladder into the air, carried it across the gravel and reared it against the house, spite of columns of smoke pouring from the lower windows. Another moment, and he had sprung up the rounds, and was battling with the mingled flames and vapours that were pouring out of an upstairs room—Helen's room!

He sprang inside, although he knew from the amount of smoke and heat that he had only a few brief moments in which to do his work. Half suffocated, he tried to look round, and his eyesight failing him, he walked forward, feeling his way, when he stumbled against something lying on the floor. Another second, and he had lifted Helen's inanimate form in his arms, dashed to the window in a state of semi-madness from the effects of the heat and smoke, and put his foot on the top round of the ladder.

It was difficult work descending, weakened, scorched, and blinded as he was; and as he got within a foot of the ground he was seen

to drop his precious burden—luckily into Mr. Graham's arms—while he himself sank back heavily on the turf. The accumulated horrors of that eventful night had been too much even for his young and active frame. He had swooned away.

And Helen, was *she* still alive? Her father bore her tenderly to the lodge, helped by some among the country people who were now hurrying to the scene of the conflagration. There her mother was waiting, and that mother expended all her care and affection in tending the beautiful girl who had almost fallen a victim to the dreadful fate of death by fire; while Mr. Graham went back to look after Bertram Wilde.

Bertie was safe enough. It was not fated that he should perish either from railway accident, or the flames, or the fall from the ladder. His ailment chiefly consisted of burns and bruises, and was trifling compared with Helen's, who did not really recover from the shock and suffocation for some months after the terrible events of that night.

How the conflagration originated remains a mystery, though it was certain that it had begun in an upstairs room. In the old timber-built château the flames had spread with marvellous rapidity. Helen had been in her room, trying to catch a sight of Bertie's train through the window, and could not have been upstairs more than half an hour when she heard her father shouting, "Helen! Helen! come down for heaven's sake!"

She rushed to the door—this is what Bertie learnt from her afterwards—and on to the landing: but the flames already had hold of the staircase, and she was driven back into her room. There she made an effort to leap down from the window, but the height was too great, and she was afraid, and the gathering resinous smoke soon paralysed her; she stood at the open window calling to her father to fetch a ladder, and it was in this position that she remained to be overpowered by the deadening torpor of suffocation. The reader knows the rest.

Bertie says that railway accident was the luckiest event that ever happened to him. Had he gone on safely to Antibes, he could not have been at the Château Y—— for full an hour more. In that time, what would or might have happened to Helen?

Of course inquiries were made as to the cause of the accident on the line. Nobody had been killed, but several persons badly injured. Eminent French engineers were of opinion that it arose from a defect in the rails just at that point. There was a grand gathering up of the scattered luggage, and Bertie was obliged to go into Antibes and claim his personal belongings. In the Commissary's room of the Gendarmerie offices, articles picked up from the wreck were spread out on a long table, to be claimed by their owners. Bertie was carelessly looking over this collection of treasure trove, when his eye lighted on a piece of jewellery.

"That ring," he said, and stretched out his hand to grasp it. It was gold, set with alternate diamonds and rubies.

"Does it belong to Monsieur?" asked the polite functionary guarding the treasures.

"No; but I think—in fact, I know the real owner."

"In that case," replied the official, "Monsieur must communicate with his friend; it must only be given up to the veritable owner."

"Do you know whereabouts it was found?" asked Bertie.

"It was found upon the rails, between two sleepers, just eight and a half metres from Antibes, where the lamentable accident occurred," answered the exact and logical-minded Frenchman.

"Ah! and has it been claimed yet?" asked Wilde.

"No, the ring has not been claimed," was the reply.

"I thought as much," remarked Bertie, as he turned away.

And the ring has never yet been claimed; nor could Bertie ever succeed in tracing its putative and presumptive owner, though he set the French police on his track. If Señor Basil Garcia reads this narrative, and wishes to claim his property, he has only to apply to the Chief Commissary of Police at Antibes, where he may perhaps hear of "something to his advantage"—perhaps not.

H. F. L.

## FROM THE GERMAN.

Oh, wither quickly, wither soon,
  Rose of the Alps, on mountain peak;
Ere yet the autumn winds have blown,
  And swept the crimson from thy cheek!

Oh, wither quickly, wither soon,
  Young heart, within me burning high;
Ere thou life's chilling frost hast known,
  And seen thy blossoms droop and die!

A. H. D.

## AN UNLUCKY RAID.

IN the good old days of the Bow Street runners, when highway assaults were rife, and solitary post-chaise travellers never journeyed without pistols in their pockets, and tremor at their hearts; when strange feats in the shape of starlight robberies were boasted of, and a "Knight of the Road" aspired to be called a gentleman, the following incident occurred.

One afternoon in early autumn, close upon sunset, a couple of well-dressed men, driving a light gig in which was a poor jaded-looking horse, stopped at a wayside posting-inn, not a hundred miles from Bath, and requested accommodation for the night. They were fashionably attired, and spoke in condescending tones to the landlord and servants, using a few words now and again of town slang, as young bucks of the first water were proud to do in that day.

Giving the horse and gig over to the care of the ostler, they adjourned to the public room and called for some light refreshments in the shape of drink, ordering a supper to be served later. The landlord himself brought in the brandy-and-water.

"What's this story about a great highway robbery near here last night, landlord?" questioned one. "We heard of it on the road, coming along. Is it true?"

"Quite true, sir. Ah, gentlemen! it is a dreadful thing—though clever, I must say. My Lady Cantifere with her two daughters was driving home across the heath an hour or two after midnight, having been to a ball, when their carriage was stopped by four mounted horsemen with cocked pistols. The old lady screamed and fainted; the young ones screamed and kicked; and the gentlemen, those audacious robbers, proceeded politely to rifle the ladies of every ornament they wore."

"Scoundrels!" interjected one of the guests.

"More than that, your worships. What should those bold blades do but invite the damsels to tread a measure with them! It was a fine night, as you may perhaps remember, sirs; the moonbeams shining bright on the bare heath. Out of the coach they handed them, and footed it in a minuet; dancing, it's said, to perfection, as though they were used to lead out the King's own daughters every night of their lives. The young ladies' screams ended in laughter; the Baroness woke up from her faint and abused them all, robbers and daughters together. Oh, they are bold, those gentlemen of the highway!"

The two gentlemen, listening to this, had gone into bursts of laughter. "But what of the men-servants?—what were they doing?" spluttered one.

"Only two were in attendance, sirs, it seems; my lady's footman in the dickey, and the postillion on the horses; and while two of the robbers were thus doing their dancing, the other two stood guard over the men, each with his pistol cocked and his hand on the trigger, ready to fire at the least movement."

"And the upshot?"

"The young ladies were bowed into their coach again, all with stately ceremony, and the robbers, after wishing them a very courteous good night, rode off at a canter, with every jewel they had possessed, small or large, costly or simple, and my lady's purse into the bargain. They may well boast that they lead merry lives, those men! Fine commotion the news has caused round about us to-day, as you may imagine, gentlemen. Everybody's talking of it."

The landlord, being called for elsewhere, retired; the travellers sipped at their glasses, laughing away, and conversing with one another in an undertone. Dusk came on, and the elder and taller of the two addressed his friend in a different tone.

"About time to see after the horse, isn't it, Jim? It's dark enough."

"I was just going to," answered Jim. And draining his glass, he went away to the stable-yard.

Looking about him, with the air of a connoisseur, after watching his horse eat up its oats, he made himself acquainted with the arrangements of the stables. Some five or six horses were in them. In the box next to his own stood a splendid animal; evidently valuable.

"A better steed nor yourn, sir!" cried the ostler from behind, in a quiet voice; and the gentleman gave a start, not thinking anybody was near.

"Ay; mine has seen good service, and he has been worked hard lately," answered the stranger, good-humouredly. "A very fine animal this, as you observe. And yet," stepping back to look critically at it, "were my horse in good condition it might not be much inferior to this. They are not altogether unlike: about the same height, and much the same in colour—brown."

With the last words, the stranger went back to the house, whistling. The ostler peered after him through the dusk while he made his comments.

"You have got a cheek, master, whoever you may be; and a impudent cheek it is. Going and comparing of the two hosses like that!—this fifty-guinea beautiful animal, and that there wretched old hack o' theirn! What next? I wonder who they be, when they be at home?" And, with that, he locked the stable door.

"Well?" cried the elder traveller when the other one returned. "Any chance?"

"Never had a better chance in all our lives," was the answer, "In the next box to ours stands one of the grandest animals you ever saw

—same colour, same size, or about it; worth a little fortune. And a set of silver-mounted harness hanging up by him."

"*Silver*-mounted?"

"Think so. Looks like it. We have got a rich chance, I tell you, Wade."

Supper was announced in due time, and the two hungry men did justice to it. Afterwards they sat over the fire, with pipes and grog, and retired to their room about eleven o'clock.

The room, a double-bedded one, was not exactly on the ground floor, but it was not much higher. A few steps leading off from the staircase conducted to it. The travellers had chosen it in preference to one at first assigned them on the second floor; one of them observing that he liked to sleep near the ground in case a fire broke out in the night, of which he had a peculiar dread.

The first thing they did on entering the chamber was to double-lock the door and put the candle out; the second was to softly open the window, to stretch their necks out of it as far as they conveniently could, and to wish the moonlight was "hanged."

"Nothing of a drop, that," observed Wade, measuring with his eye the space to the ground. "A child might jump it. Shut down the window, Jim, and let's have a pipe. Hang that moon again! I thought you were wrong in foretelling it would be a dark night."

Shutting the window as softly as he had opened it, Jim and his friend, each taking a short, well-worn pipe from his pocket, sat down to smoke. From another pocket came forth a flask of some kind of liquor. Thus they made themselves comfortable, and seemed to forget all about bed.

At any rate, neither of them attempted to go to it. They sat on, and smoked, and drank at the flask occasionally, and whispered together in hushed tones. At last the clock struck two. One of them rose, drew aside the window curtain and looked out.

A suppressed shout of exultation broke from him. "Wade, Wade! the night has changed. It's raining, and the moon is gone. I knew rain was coming."

"Man alive, don't make that row," retorted the other. "We don't want the house woke up."

Putting away their pipes and flasks, they opened the window with crafty gentleness, and dropped down on the ground outside it, one after the other. The night was very dark, no light, or glimmer of it, was to be seen anywhere.

Making their way round cautiously to the coach-house and stables, Jim produced a master key which undid the locks. The stable door he undid was the one that had the valuable horse in it; and he was surprised to find what an easy lock it was. Then, while the other man kept watch, he hastily and noiselessly attached the horse to their own gig, using the harness he had admired so greatly. The rain was dashing down smartly, which tended to deaden other

sounds. When all was ready, they cautiously led the horse and gig out of the yard, and to a distance beyond it, got in, and drove away at a spanking pace.

So far they were well-satisfied with their night's work, and congratulated themselves on the valuable prize they had captured in the horse and harness. It's true the horse appeared to require the whip pretty frequently, and Jim, who was driving, did not fail to administer it.

"Lazy beggar! he has stuffed himself out with corn," cried he. "You shall fast all this day, my gentleman, and that will bring you into working order. What a pelt it is!" looking up at the pouring rain. "Should say this was the clearing shower."

"What'll the job bring us in, Jim?"

"Twenty pounds, clear, I reckon. And an old hack thrown in to complete the bargain."

On the heath now, they began laughing over the past night's adventure there, as related to them by the landlord. They had no fear of the highwaymen themselves, not they: such gentry do not prey upon one another.

"Hang it, Jim! can't you drive faster?" cried Wade, suddenly.

Jim made no answer. He was beginning to feel somewhat puzzled; for, unless he was greatly mistaken, the beautiful horse betrayed unmistakable signs of giving in. Their own wretched animal could do as well as this. Presently it stopped; stopped dead from exhaustion.

"What the devil's the matter with him?" demanded Wade.

"Be shot if I know. He seems dead beat. It's so dark one can see nothing. Wish that moon would come out!—the rain has ceased."

"Well, this is a pretty go!" exclaimed the other, as the horse, in spite of whip and word, refused to move. "Brought up, before one's half beyond danger, with a stolen horse! You must have been mistaken in the worth of the animal, Jim: never knew you mistake one before."

"It beats me hollow," returned Jim, his crestfallen tone betraying some alarm. "As to being mistaken in him, I know I never was; there. Something extraordinary must ail the horse."

He jumped out of the gig and began feeling the animal with his hands. At the same moment the coy moon burst out from behind the clouds and shone down in all her splendour. Jim felt the horse, stared at it, and stared again. The other one in the gig was also gazing curiously. Simultaneously a shout of dismay, followed by an imprecation, burst from both of them. *They had stolen their own horse.*

Some mutual recrimination ensued. Wade accusing Jim of having made a mistake and opened the wrong stable; Jim vowing by all that's blue that he had opened the right one.

"Anyway, we've got the harness," pleaded Jim.

The remark caused Wade to turn his eyes on it; its silver points were glittering in the moonlight. A closer glance, and then another angry shout broke from him.

"Look here, you fool—here's a *crest*."

"Hey—what?" cried Jim, turning round.

Sure enough: the silver-mounted harness bore a family crest with its Latin motto, and could no doubt be identified anywhere. Certainly this night's anticipated spoil was not lucky in any way.

Next morning the landlord of the inn was intensely surprised at the disappearance of the travellers, and at the spiriting away of some harness that belonged to the young Viscount Dare. He stood in the stable-yard talking with his ostler.

"But for me his lordship's hoss would ha' gone too," cried the ostler stolidly. "When I see one o' they two gents a poking and peering about here last night under cover o' the dusk, and see him gazing at the fine animal with hungry eyes, and next watched him a fingering the stable-lock, it struck me what he might be after—the wanting to have a try at changing their own sorry hack for this one. So the last thing at night, before turning in, I changed the hosses; putting theirn in the best stable, and t'other here, and made him safe with my bar and padlock which can't be picked. And they've just been and gone away with their own."

"Why didn't you change the harness as well?"

"Well, I never thought o' the harness."

But in the course of the day a messenger brought the harness back—and did not wait to ask for that of the travellers.

So the landlord, by the bargain, got a set of plain harness, which really was not bad, and he let the unlucky thieves alone.

## THE EARLY RAIN.

Down through the misty air,
  Down from the gloom above,
Falling, pattering everywhere,
  The rain comes quick with love.
Softly the missel-thrush
  Sings in the golden storm;
The robin under a laurel bush
  Waits for to-morrow morn.

Drip, drip, drip from the eaves,
  Pit, pit, pit on the pane,
Swish, swish, swish on the drenchéd leaves,
  List! 'tis the song of the rain.
Grasses are bending low,
  Green is the corn and thick;
You can almost see the nettles grow,
  They grow so strong and quick.

Soft is the wind from the west,
  Softer the rain's low sigh;
The sparrow washes his smoky breast,
  And watches the gloomy sky.
Stirred are the boughs by the breeze,
  Scarcely a leaf is still,
Something is moving among the trees
  Like a restless spirit of ill.

Standing watching the rain,
  Do you not seem to hear
The voice of God outspeaking again
  To man's ungrateful ear?
Promising plenty and peace,
  Garners with treasure heaped,
That seedtime and harvest shall not cease
  Till the Harvest of Earth be reaped.

J. T. Burton Wollaston.

ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

"AND NOW WE MUST GO TO OUR LESSONS," SAID ALICE CLEARE.

# THE ARGOSY.

*MAY, 1882.*

## MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

### CHAPTER XVII.

THE ORIENTAL MYSTERY.

FRANK RAVEN went into the house of the Reverend James Connell in a perfect state of bewilderment, not due to the Minister's hearty greeting, or to Mrs. Connell's warm and tearful embrace. Could this be the same world which had seemed to him so dark and cold hardly half an hour ago?

"And so our dear Miss Cleare knows you already!" cried Mina, the youngest girl, dancing round Frank in high delight, for it was no Connell fashion to be shy. "When she heard a Mr. Frank Raven was coming down with our brother Philip, she told us how she had met you once when she had lost her way, and how kind you were. But she said you would not remember her."

"And you do, don't you, Frank?" laughed Philip.

"Why should I not?—when Miss Cleare remembers me," demanded Frank. And Philip laughed again, and thought Frank was readier than one might suppose. But Frank's colour had heightened considerably; and Miss Cleare's face was turned away.

A bountiful meal was already spread on the long dining-room table, and a most hospitable fire was glowing in the grate, very welcome in the chill evening.

The strange cousin was the object of everybody's interest and solicitude, but the Connells were accustomed to strangers, and were not awed into silence by their presence. The two younger sisters had their budget of news for Philip; Percy was telling his father some items of town gossip he had heard at the railway station, and Mrs. Connell kept assuring Frank how glad, how very glad she was to see him—her dear brother's favourite boy! And she was so pleased to see he had the Raven face—yes; he certainly had the Raven face. Not that she could say he was like any particular Raven she remembered either in real life or in pictures.

"Pictures!" cried Percy, catching at the word. "Why, I forgot to tell you—just fancy our forgetting it, Louie!—that Learli is here. He is safely arrived, mother."

"Why didn't you bring him straight here, as I bade you and Louisa to do—if only for this first evening—if he did come?" asked Mrs. Connell quite severely. Her children could never do anything worse in her eyes than neglect hospitality.

"I'm sure I pressed him hard enough—and so, I suppose, did Louisa," said Percy carelessly. "I daresay he was tired after his journey. He looked like a ghost as he got out of the train."

"The appearance of Coltburn must have scared him, then," remarked Philip, "he seemed well enough on our journey down. But these foreigners are generally pale."

"He always struck me as delicate when we were staying at Sandgate," said Mrs. Connell. "One could never rely on him. He would be bright and cheerful as possible one hour, and languid and dull the next. I thought the long walks he took did not agree with him: he was always worse after them: and as for his sketching trips, when he went off for a day or two—they will be the death of him by-and-by, if they go on wearing him out as they seemed to wear him then. Does he call himself quite well now, Louisa?"

"He seems in rather low spirits," Louisa replied, evasively.

"I'm glad he is to settle here awhile," said kind Mrs. Connell; "we shall be able to look after him a little."

"He spoke this evening as if he might go away again very soon," observed Louisa, half reluctantly.

There was a chorus of exclamations—"Whatever for?"

"Is he alone in England?" asked Philip.

"Yes," spoke up the minister. "It appears he is an orphan, and was brought up by strangers in his own country; which he only left some two years ago."

"I have at times wondered if he is an orphan," observed Mrs. Connell, "sometimes even whether he really thinks he is one. He said something to me once ——" she paused. "Ah, it was nothing," she continued—"nothing but a hint—that the best sons of his unhappy country were her prisoners and her exiles—and that even in lands of liberty they were not safe from spies and treachery. His parents were noble," he said. "Perhaps they are living yet in some poor disguise!"

"Oh, I think he was romancing then!" said Percy. "It's my opinion that Marco Learli *can* romance," and he looked significantly across the table to Louisa.

"There may be plenty of room for romance to play its part in many Italian lives," observed Mr. Connell. "When we think of the crowds of political prisoners, and the possible fates of their deprived families, it is easy to understand the tragedies, the dramas, that must exist among them: and the hopes—the dreams—of what

some fortunate revolution may restore to them. The miserable are often comforted by the imagination. I am told that foundlings commonly indulge in the positive belief that they have specially good blood in their veins, and are the lost or stolen children of distinguished parents."

"Ay," said Philip, "that possibility must be a comfort for the people in the world who don't know who they are. They must be pretty numerous. We know one—a young lady—don't we?" he added, nodding at Frank. "She was an old acquaintance of mine in London, and has just been engaged as companion to Frank's mother at Ravenscourt."

"Ah, your poor mother! How is she?" said Mrs. Connell in a whisper to Frank. "I hope she will not be troubled at your coming here? I should not like to pain her just now—glad as I am to see you; and quite sure, too, that you have done right in coming."

"She is pretty well, thank you," answered Frank. "I wrote to tell her I was coming here, and I mean to write to her from your house to-night."

"That is right," assented his aunt; "when we do anything that may seem to want explanation, it is best to take the matter into our own hands in time." And then she sighed. Never for one moment had she repented of her marriage with the Rev. Mr. Connell: but they had long ago both agreed that it might have been possible to have got their wills less wilfully. They had run off and got married without previous warning or notice to the Ravens. It had seemed to them at the time like a stroke of good generalship and great strength. Later years had brought the conviction that it had been a confession of weakness—a sign that they felt they might not withstand the arguments and opposition they would have had to encounter had they announced their intended union in a more regular way. The offence had not been unpardonable, but frank-speaking Mrs. Connell never denied that it had brought a two-fold punishment—giving her brother some justification for his estrangement; and his wife some excuse for her encouragement of its persistence—and worse still, making the couple themselves feel a little uncertain about their own children's confidences.

"Yes, Frank," she said, "you did right."

The conversation at the other end of the table was growing animated. A remark of Percy's began it. "Those people who do not know who they are," cried he, "should consult the Oriental Mystery we have just got down here. I wonder how many will go to her?"

"Poor foolish things!" cried his father. "They must be sorely tempted, to try so forlorn a hope as the consulting of impostors. The unfortunate are always inclined to try desperate resources."

"Of course, this one could tell them anything she chose," Percy went on, "and they could not prove whether it was true or false."

"No, and what an awkward fix they might get into," observed

Philip. "Fancy if she said, 'You are the son of so-and-so,' naming some prince or millionaire, would it be possible to refrain from going to that magnate and saying, 'I am your son: claim me!' The result might be a police inquiry, medical opinions on sanity, and free entertainment in mad-house or gaol."

"One wonders whether some chain of circumstances forged by mystery, acting upon ignorance and credulity, may not occasionally lie at the bottom of the extraordinary pretensions contained in the police reports, and made by people of respectable exterior and presumably sane manners," exclaimed Mr. Connell.

"Our young friend, Aunt Raven's new companion, got rather a blow the other day," narrated Philip: who apparently saw no reason for observing reticence on the subject. "She chanced to see an advertisement which she thought showed some connection with her own history, and she went to the address indicated and found that it was really the case of a missing child. But it all came to nothing."

"I trust it won't disturb the girl's mind," remarked Mrs. Connell. "It is a dangerous thing to get fixed ideas of this kind: they lead to unpleasantness sometimes."

By-and-by the minister rose. "I am sorry that I and Mrs. Connell have to leave you for the early part of this evening," he said; "we have to attend an important meeting in connection with our Sunday-school and Bible-class. But we shall hope to get a quiet hour with you and Philip afterwards, Frank."

When he and his wife were departing, the whole family ran after their parents and took a warmer leave of them than would have been thought necessary at Ravenscourt before a month's separation. Frank and Alice were left for a moment alone.

"They are all so kind," she said, "I am quite at home here already. I am sure you will enjoy your visit."

He was thinking how new was her brother's lonely grave in the little churchyard at Gerstowe; newer even than his father's coffin in the dreary Raven vaults. And yet she was not afraid to be content and thankful—though, as he looked at her, he felt sure that the sorrow she had so bravely borne since he first saw her, had worn her somewhat. On that evening in the lanes, he had not noticed she was so thin—and, pretty as he had thought her then, surely she had grown sweeter now!

"And now we must go to our lessons," said Alice Cleare, as the young men came back into the room, after changing their dress for the evening. She extended a hand to each of her pupils, as the two children came running up to her.

"Oh, may we not have a remission of duty this one night, Miss Cleare?" pleaded Philip, engagingly.

Miss Cleare smiled, but shook her head. "Pleasure will last the longer if it is not taken in one whole continuous dose," she replied.

"That's a bad compliment to me somehow," cried Philip. "How

is it? I believe it is a didactic way of saying that when the novelty of my society wears off, there's nothing else left!"

But the two little girls assented, without any but a playful, mock demurring. They had learned to like and obey Miss Cleare.

"Dear me! I should not have thought she would be such a martinet!" pondered Percy aloud. "There's something at the bottom of this. Does she think she's in our way, I wonder?" He jumped up to run after her. She had already become a great favourite with the lad.

"I say, Miss Cleare," he cried frankly, standing at the foot of the stairs, just as her skirt disappeared round the landing. "I hope you're not going off because you think we might prefer to be alone? Never such a mistake in the world! Come back instantly!" commanded the young despot.

Miss Cleare came back a few steps, but it was only to bend over the banister, and whisper, "One can't make acquaintance with a crowd, you know, and Mr. Raven is a stranger. He will be at home with us all the more quickly by taking us in detachments. That is why I go away with the children. I am quite sure you do not wish me to go," she added, for the girl hated every appearance of that self-isolation which the lonely are sometimes apt to affect when it is not imposed on them.

"Whew! You're a rock of sense, as our old nurse used to say," answered Percy. "I'll go back at once."

"You need not repeat what I said," hinted Alice Cleare, alarmed.

"No," he answered: "I'll uphold you as a martyr to duty in the cause of education." And Percy retreated to the drawing-room.

"Unsuccessful, eh?" laughed Philip, moving his chair a little that his brother might edge in beside him. "Could not you wile her back?"

"What is it?" asked Percy, with a careless nonchalance, as if he had forgotten the errand he had started on. "Oh, Miss Cleare!—no, she won't come. It *is* bad to be irregular with lessons. She's a jolly girl, though."

The boy's frank commendation, couched in the one phrase he applied to every feminine creature whom he liked, between the ages of five and fifty, sounded like flat blasphemy to Frank. *He* was more inclined to regard Alice Cleare as an angel than a "jolly girl."

"And now I will tell you about the Oriental Mystery," cried Percy. "You must go to see her, Philip. You can't think how queer she is. I'm almost beginning to think there must be something at the bottom of these things."

"Of course there is," said Philip drily. "Plenty of impudence and a little chicanery."

"Ah, it's easy saying that, Philip. I should have said so myself yesterday; but to-day I feel there are some things I can't explain—things quite beyond my understanding!"

"I should hope so, for the sake of the universe," laughed Philip.

"Wait till you hear," was Percy's good-natured exhortation. "To begin with: do you remember Daylight Villa?"

"I believe so. Is it not the yellow brick house close behind the railway station: which was built by that queer man who lectures on phrenology and mesmerism?"

"Lectures!" echoed Percy—"he has been dead more than two years, Philip. Yes, that's the identical house, Daylight Villa, and his widow now lets it out in furnished lodgings——"

"He must have named it in a symbolic sense," interposed Philip, "for, as a matter of fact, it never gets any daylight unadulterated by railway smoke and steam. Are the lodgings advertised as cheerful and attractive?"

"I don't know; they are generally full. How you interrupt one, Philip! Strolling players, and circus-people, and such-like lodge there."

"A suspicious class of life in which to find a mystic oracle!" commented Philip.

"Oh, some of them are decent enough," said Percy, eagerly. "Why, there was a fellow here calling himself "the bare-back-rider of the Pampas," and he supported a blind widowed mother and three sisters. My father found that out, because the poor fellow got a broken rib. I can tell you, Philip, he respected that man."

"A valuable member of society, no doubt," gravely observed Philip. "Go on, lad."

"Well, I went to see her this morning," said Percy: "I mean the Oracle. And when I got to Daylight Villa, I felt quite taken aback as to whom I should ask for—the queer foreign name had gone clean out of my head, and I didn't like to inquire for the 'Oriental Mystery.' But the dirty little servant seemed to guess what I had come for, for while I was having a try at the outlandish syllables, she opened the parlour door, and ushered me in."

"Into the presence of the Mystery," assented Philip.

"And a rare mystery she is!" Percy answered. "The window-blinds were down; and they are red blinds, as you may see from the outside; and from first to last, all the while I stayed, I could not decide whether she was thirty or sixty!"

"Always a mystery!" ejaculated Philip.

"She rose up to meet me as if she knew me quite well," continued Percy. "'Sit down, my friend,' she said: 'you have done wisely to come while my powers are fresh. I believe I shall be able to speak to you with the open vision. I have seen you before—not in the flesh—but——'"

"Oh, this is delightful," interrupted Louisa Connell, who had listened in silence. "It makes me quite creep!"

"So it made me," owned the ingenuous Percy. "But I soon reflected perhaps this is what she says to everybody. So I wouldn't

even ask her where or how she had seen me, lest she should manage to make more out of my questions, than I should out of her answers. I believe I was born for a lawyer, Philip, mind you, though I'm only to be an engineer."

"Likely enough, boy. At odd moments I say I was born to be a general. Well?"

"Well. 'I have seen you when I was sitting quite alone, many miles away from here,' she said. 'At that time it was not revealed to me who you were. I think it is being revealed to me now. One of your names is a great and famous name in history—is it not? Answer me no more than yes or no.'—I wouldn't trust myself with one word, Philip, I was so afraid I might let out something: so I just nodded in answer."

"Silence is golden," put in Philip.

"'I see, in my mind's eye, a bunch of keys passed through a gate on a spear,' she went on. 'Do you know what that means?' Still I would not do anything else but nod; but I couldn't help nodding vigorously."

"Why, she must have meant the legend about the Northumbrian Percies—or Pierce-eyes," said Louisa, under her breath.

"Of course she did," assented Percy, eagerly; "and then she added, 'Your other name is not so grand a one; but it belongs to good folk. In a minute I think I may be able to say it. I see it before me, but the letters flicker in the vision. It is either Connen or Connell. I think it is Connell.' There now, what do you think of that?"

"Turn round and face me, Percy," said Philip Connell, mysteriously.

Percy turned and faced him. "I'm telling you nothing but the real truth," he said, half thinking his brother was inclined to give him the nursery ordeal of "looking him straight in the eyes."

Philip laid a hand on each of the lad's shoulders, and looked on this side of him, and on that, but did not seem to get the satisfaction he had expected. Then he released him.

"Now get out your handkerchief, Percy."

"What on earth are you after?" asked the astonished Percy. "Is my own brother turning into a European mystery?"

"Get out your handkerchief," reiterated Philip. And Percy obeyed.

Philip took it, and turned up its corners. He found the marks on it, and carefully examined them. They were the initials D.M.

"That was sent back from the laundry instead of one of mine," observed Percy. "And I didn't notice the mistake when I took it out of the drawer this morning."

"And have you used this handkerchief all day, lad? Are you sure you took no other with you to Daylight Villa?"

"Quite sure. Why do you ask?"

"Because I thought this astute sorceress might have read your

name thereon, or in the inside of your shirt-collar," answered Philip. "It seems this explanation won't hold good, though of course some other will. Well, what else did she tell you? Try to keep to her own words."

"I have kept to them, Philip. Well, she looked hard at me, and she said, 'You are very happy at home. You are one of a large family, and many of you, sons and daughters, are out in the world. But you have a very pretty sister at home, yet.'"

Louisa's cheeks were flaming. Philip shouted with laughter. "That's mistake number one," he cried, in ungallant brotherly banter.

Percy himself began to giggle, as he proceeded. "Next she said, 'There's a strange visitor coming to see you to-day: somebody who has never been in your town before.' Ah, but she did not mean you," he added, as Frank bent forward with deepening interest. "'For,' she said, 'the visitor comes from afar. I see great waves rolling between him and the graves of his forefathers. His face is pale and his voice is low, but there is fire in his heart.' Yes, Louisa," nodding at his sister, for the girl had started forward with parted lips, "you see whom she must have meant—young Learli. And when I saw him this afternoon, I thought that she might well call his face pale!"

"And did you still refrain from questions?" asked Philip.

"I did not see any reason to do so over this," admitted Percy. "No. 'Is this stranger coming to stay with us?' I asked—of course I knew Learli was not to do so. 'I think not,' she answered: 'but I seem to see him under your roof for this one night.' So ——"

"Mistake number two," cried Philip.

"But it might so easily have been true," exclaimed Louisa, rather excitedly. "I'm sure, Percy, you remember how mamma urged us to bring Marco home with us for to-night if we met him. She can't bear for strangers to feel lonely in lodgings."

"Well, and we pressed him to come," said Percy; "and I, knowing then of the prophecy, and how everything else had turned out true, made quite sure he would come. But he didn't, you see."

"I cannot think why he would not!" mused Louisa, gazing into the fire.

"Anyway, his coming into the town to-day was true," Percy remarked. "And not a soul, save ourselves, knew that; and we were not quite sure of it; so she could not have heard it."

"And, pray, didn't she next foretell my home-coming—and our cousin Frank's first visit to his kinsfolk?" questioned Philip.

"No, she did not. And I wanted to make her say something about Miss Cleare. I put her on the track by asking if she did not see another young lady at home as well as my sister. But she said, 'No, she didn't.'"

"It's an insult to be omitted in a prophecy," said Philip gravely.

"But I think I hear Miss Cleare's step. Is this weighty matter to be kept secret from her?"

"Oh dear, no," answered Percy, as the governess entered. "I have told her about it already; and she only read me a lecture for visiting such people on the sly."

"Then we are to understand that you don't approve of mysteries, Miss Cleare?" said Philip, as he rose and placed a chair for her between himself and Louisa.

"Not of mysteries which only tell us our own names, and about visitors we expect already," she replied with a smile. "I think most of us have better mysteries than those in our every-day lives."

"But not so strange and incomprehensible," interposed Louisa.

"Far more strange and incomprehensible, I think," answered Alice. "Has it ever struck you that no 'wonder' can be more wonderful than many processes of nature are?"

"Then you don't believe in ghosts—or the second sight—or clairvoyance?" asked Louisa.

Alice sat in silence for a moment. And when she answered she spoke softly.

"I do not refuse to believe in anything," she said. "And I think our own hearts often feel that they touch the outside of secrets they may not yet enter upon. But I always feel that these lie in a region quite closed to the world, not excepting the professional traffickers in the marvellous."

"Ah," said Philip, with a curious smile, "I fancy you believe in only the ghosts which two people—or, at any rate, three—do not see at the same time, and in presentiments which one would not utter to mankind in general for untold gold. And those are precisely the ghosts and the clairvoyance which no science will ever be able to disprove, though it may continue to treat them with a decent incredulity—like that with which the unmusical receive hints of the mysteries of music."

Somehow, at that moment, Frank and Miss Cleare's eyes met.

And close upon that a servant entered the room to say that two people had called about some chapel business—a Dorcas party—or something of that sort—and as Mr. and Mrs. Connell were both out, they would be glad to speak with Miss Louisa, which broke up the little circle gathered round the fire.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### MRS. RAVEN'S DETERMINATION.

Evelyn Agate thoroughly enjoyed her new life at Ravenscourt. While poor Frank had been pining in the Temple, home-sick and heart-sick, she felt as if she had entered on a new and charmed existence. She did not miss the bright presence of Gertrude Agate, the devoted service of Mary Davies, or the deep, strong current of varying

life which ever flowed through Gertrude's quaint parlour. Ease and luxury, pomp and show were more to Evelyn than truth and love.

The three, Mrs. Raven, Leonard and Evelyn, were all seated together at breakfast, each alternately giving forth those graceful little utterances which usually pass to and fro among people who live together, but who do not live in each other's lives, when Budd brought in the letters. Or rather, he brought in a letter; for the post had left but one: a somewhat rare occurrence at Ravenscourt.

This solitary letter was for Mrs. Raven herself.

A few weeks ago, her face would not have brightened at sight of its superscription. For it was in Frank's handwriting. It did so now. But as she read it her wan countenance flushed. It was the letter in which Frank announced his intention of going to Coltburn. So! She had driven Frank into freedom: and now, when she wished to call him back, she found he was already asserting himseif in antagonism to the accustomed ways of the family! He must be gaining new ideas and forming new associations. And thus the future would have new elements in it, quite alien from the past. Her heart rose within her with a bitter protest.

But as she read the whole, some of the bitterness died away.

"DEAR MOTHER,—I daresay you will be surprised to hear that I am about to pay a visit to my aunt at Coltburn. My cousin Philip wishes to run home for the Michaelmas holidays, and as I am his guest just now, he is quite determined to carry me with him. I feel sure you will have no objection to the plan, since you raised none to my visiting Philip in London, and I fancy there has been no real antagonism between the Ravens and the Connells for years past, though habit and preoccupation have kept up the separation and silence. Philip always speaks with delight of his short stay at Ravenscourt, during my father's lifetime.

"I hope you and Leonard are quite well. Please give my compliments to Miss Evelyn Agate: she is, I suppose, quite settled by this time."

"It is a letter from Frank, Leonard," explained Mrs. Raven. "And where do you think he is going? He is actually going on a visit to the Connells at Coltburn—going there with Philip!"

She wished her manner to convey a little mild reprobation. Leonard was quite prepared to hear reprobation, neither limited nor mild. He had never sympathised in the alienation between the Ravens and the Connells. He shrank from all strong feeling of any kind. The Connells lived far enough away—nor were they poor relations in the objectionable sense of the phrase. A slight, easy civility towards them could not be very troublesome, as Leonard had always thought. It was quite as well, perhaps, that it should begin through Frank: it did not matter what *he* did. And the old, rude breach might thus be healed, without any other advances on the part of the Ravens.

"Going to the Connells, at Coltburn, is he?" said Leonard aloud, after a few moments' pause. "Well, why should he not go? I have thought it was a great mistake they were not visited before."

"Ah, time changes everything; and so it is not unnatural when some of our feelings change, too," observed Mrs. Raven.

Leonard looked up. Was she uttering a reproach? He did not think so. Truly, he thought, nothing was changing so much as she was herself!

"I am quite sure your father had felt reconciled to his sister for a long time before his death," said Mrs. Raven, catching at the suggestion offered in Frank's letter. "He had spoken of her to me two or three times of late, and most kindly. They had exchanged messages that time when her son Philip was here. You see she let Philip come to us; why, then, should we grudge Frank's going to her?"

"I am only too glad you see it in that light," said Leonard.

"Young Mr. Connell used to be full of stories about his pleasant visit to Ravenscourt," observed Evelyn, wishing to make herself agreeable. It was not strictly true, but he had mimicked his Aunt Raven's voice and the solemn gait of Mr. Budd, the butler.

"Ah, you knew Philip Connell in London, didn't you?" remarked Leonard, turning to her briskly. "Is he getting on well? Do you think he is forming a good connection at the Bar?"

"He is considered very clever indeed," answered Evelyn, suavely. She did not add that the judges, whose verdict she thus reported, were rather young journalists and special reporters, than grave legal dignitaries.

"I should like to see her," said Mrs. Raven, speaking of the minister's wife. "She is your aunt, Leonard, your father's sister, you know. You may not be aware, Miss Evelyn, that an estrangement has existed, and I have never seen Mrs. Connell since her marriage. For her own sake we could not rejoice over that event. Mr. Connell we always felt was a most worthy and talented person, but he led her into a life of hardship, comparatively speaking, from which her friends would have liked to save her. However, things turned out, I fancy, better than might have been expected. And I believe," sighed Mrs. Raven, "they have been very happy? Yes, sometimes I have thought I should like to go to see her."

"I should think she too would be glad to see you," replied Evelyn, scenting some agreeable variety from afar.

A silence ensued. Mrs. Raven's head was bent in reflection.

"Leonard!" she exclaimed presently, looking up, "suppose I write to Mrs. Connell, and suggest a little visit to her at once? Frank will be there by Michaelmas-day: and his presence beforehand will take off the strangeness of the proposal—yes, and of my arrival there. You have been saying I need a change."

"It is not a bad idea," answered Leonard, who was beginning to assent or dissent with considerable caution, always wondering what

would follow next: for he really did not feel sure his mother's mind was not unhinged. "From the New Forest to Coltburn would be a change indeed! Not for the best, one might say—only that change of any kind, merely as change, is known to be a remedial agent."

"You have no objection, Leonard?"

"Certainly not. I hope it will do you good."

"Then I will go; and without loss of time, lest my resolution fail," decided Mrs. Raven with unwonted alacrity. "I will telegraph to Mrs. Connell, and ask her to telegraph her answer. That will show my visit to be what it is—the result of a sudden impulse, and will deprecate any formal preparation."

"It breaks the ice boldly, at any rate," answered Leonard, "and throws us all back on the old relationship. Nobody but relatives or very great friends would venture on such a thing. Do it, by all means. Shall you travel alone?"

"No, I shall ask if I may bring my friend, Miss Agate: and I am quite sure what the answer will be," said Mrs. Raven, with the ghost of a smile. "And so Miss Evelyn, as Michaelmas-day is the day after to-morrow, and as we may start on the thirtieth—that will be next Thursday, you know—I think we may as well begin to see about making certain preparations at once."

As Mrs. Raven pushed back her own chair when she spoke these words, Evelyn understood them to mean her own dismissal from the breakfast table, and arose and departed accordingly.

"Frank wrote a very kind letter, Leonard," said the mother, when she was left alone with her son.

"Why should he not?" returned Leonard. "Your nervousness, mother, is driving you into all sorts of fancies." But he extended his hand for the letter she held. He read it through—actually glanced over it again, and handed it back. Mrs. Raven put it into her pocket. It was the first letter from Frank which she had ever kept. All his school-boy scrawls to her had gone straight into the fire. Those to his father, she had found only last week made into a packet, and stored in the dead squire's wardrobe.

"Have you any plans for to-day, Leonard?" she asked, presently. Her husband had arranged his plans to suit household habits, but household habits had to be constantly rearranged to suit Leonard's plans.

"I am going to Standchester."

"Shall you dine there?"

"I suppose so," he said: "but let me have a substantial supper when I return. You know my appetite is never good away from home, and never better than after a day's absence."

"Very well, Leonard. That arrangement will suit me admirably. It will give me a long day for my preparations."

"I should not think you need much preparation for going to Coltburn," remarked Leonard, with a half smile.

"One always has sundry matters to see to, even for a short

absence," she answered. "I feel there is no doubt as to the way Mrs. Connell will receive the idea of my coming. I shall not telegraph till Michaelmas-day. I should like Frank to be there when the message arrives."

"Do as you think best, mother," said Leonard. And so they parted for the day.

During its earlier hours Mrs. Raven and her companion did not see much of each other. The elder lady shut herself up in her boudoir; Evelyn amused herself in her own apartment. They met for midday dinner; and at afternoon tea Mrs. Raven suggested a walk together to the village. She wanted to call at the Vicarage, to leave a request that Mr. Toynbee would send up the clothing club account books at an earlier date than usual, that she might go over them before she went from home. There were two or three little purchases, too, which she might make at the same time. The village shops were of the humblest description, but the Raven family had always made a point of patronising them occasionally.

It was a glorious evening, the sun bright yet, but there was already a fine keen edge to the air, and as they went down the avenue Mrs. Raven remarked that the evenings were fast drawing in.

"But we shall be back before dusk," she said. "Our errands need not detain us long. And I do so enjoy a walk at this hour. I think the country looks at its best, and the breeze is so invigorating."

"Twilight rambles here must be delightful," responded Evelyn. "And, of course, one is quite safe from annoyance. The country is so different from London."

"I am not sure that it is always safer," replied Mrs. Raven. "But I think Ravenstoke is an exceptionally well-conducted place."

They turned out of the avenue into the high road as she spoke these words, and came right in front of a tall man, with ruddy chestnut locks, a fresh complexion, and a garb between a labourer's and a gamekeeper's. He lifted his hat, and stepped into the road when he saw them.

"What a fine-looking person!" said Evelyn, as they passed on. "He might be a prince in the garb of a peasant."

Mrs. Raven shook her head. She had not forgotten the mysterious link which the burned paper had established in her mind between Evelyn Agate and Eldred Sloam. But whatever it might mean, she felt sure this girl knew less even than herself. Therefore she might say what was natural to be said under the circumstances.

"I regret to say that man is one of our few black sheep, handsome though he is. His is a sad history, Miss Evelyn, and I am sorry to say it is not wholly disconnected with the Court. It is a story I do not care to tell. My husband allowed him a cottage on the estate, and other privileges: my son Leonard feels inclined to be less generous. But I have interceded for the man; for the present, at least; and I think the future may depend on his own conduct."

"What is his name?" asked Evelyn.

"Eldred Sloam," answered Mrs. Raven, with a slight emphasis on the Christian name. If Evelyn remembered it in the Raven genealogy, its mention now, coupled with the hint she had given, might convey volumes.

"Eldred Sloam!" echoed Evelyn. "Surely I have heard Mr. Frank Raven mention that name?"

"Very likely," said Mrs. Raven. "My son could scarcely narrate any village incident without bringing it in. Eldred is a good cricketer and an excellent shot; but he is nothing of a workman, an idle labourer, and a bad moral character."

Their errand at the Vicarage detained them longer than they had expected. The Vicar was out. So were his maid-servants. And the person left in charge was a feeble old woman, too deaf and self-mistrustful to take a message, so that she insisted on taking the ladies into the drawing-room, and hobbling off in search of the housekeeper, who, she thought, was not very far off. Before she was found and brought back, more than half an hour had passed.

"We must make haste over our shopping," said Mrs. Raven.

Their next visit was to the stationer's shop, where they bought luggage labels, and two or three similar trifles: which Evelyn slipped into her reticule.

"Now I must go to the draper's," said Mrs. Raven. "I want some knitting wool."

"Do you get good shades here?"

"Oh dear, no: they have no stock of that kind. I want white wool, and they always keep that on hand, clean and fine."

Here there occurred another delay. The master of the shop was out, and the shop-boy, a new hand, did not know exactly where the white wool was kept. After searching for some time he found it. Mrs. Raven ordered a considerable quantity to be sent up to the Court next morning. But she wished to pay for it at once. That was impossible, however, for the boy did not know its price. So it was arranged that the bill should be sent with the parcel.

"It will be dusk before we reach the Court gates," she said to Evelyn as they left the shop.

So they walked on quickly, and were within sight of the avenue, when Mrs. Raven stopped short, with a sudden start.

"My purse!" she exclaimed. "What have I done with it?"

"Is it not in your pocket?" asked Evelyn.

"No, it isn't," she replied, and she shook her dress as she spoke. "I carried it in my hand all the time. I remember I had it after I left the Vicarage."

"Of course you had," said Evelyn; "you paid the stationer."

"I must have left it at his shop or the other," Mrs. Raven remarked, though still fumbling over her dress and pockets. "I had

gold and silver in it—I don't know how much—and some memoranda besides."

"In such a place as this you are sure to recover it."

"Yes," assented Mrs. Raven: "unless I dropped it on one of the shop floors, or in the road, and somebody dishonest picks it up. It would be a great temptation to a poor person."

"I will go back for it at once," said Evelyn: "I had better."

Mrs. Raven looked up at the fast darkening sky. "Shall you not be timid at going alone?" she said.

"Timid!" cried Evelyn, "certainly not. I shall only enjoy the adventure."

"Well, as no time should be lost—if you really don't mind going, Miss Evelyn? Then the nearest way will be through the Court grounds and out at a gate at the side. That cuts off a corner. But do you know that way? Do not take it unless you do."

"I know it perfectly well," said Evelyn. "I have been over it two or three times already. Good-bye for the present. I shall be back before you can begin to expect me."

She flew off with the light steps of strong unburdened youth. Mrs. Raven looked after her with a dim smile on her wan face. But it died suddenly. She started forward, as if to overtake the girl, but she was already out of sight. She called her, but Evelyn was out of hearing, too. Why had she changed her mind? Why did she wish her back?

Had she not sent the girl, by her own express instructions, on the very road where the ghost was said to walk, the Warren Road?

"How foolish I am growing!" she said to herself, in severity. "Am I beginning to believe in ghosts and fortune-tellers? Still—I shall be glad to see her safely back. I do wish she had gone the other way!—still it could not have taken ten minutes more. The Warren Road is lonely—and one cannot tell!"

She went on to the house, wandered into the drawing-room, and sat down to wait. Afterwards it struck her as a curious fact that the thought never occurred to her to send a servant to meet Evelyn Agate.

Evelyn sped over the ground at her utmost speed. She felt rather frightened, after all. Her London-bred nerves were not accustomed to the solitude and the many slight eerie noises which accompany the nightly slumber of nature. She knew the lane down which she should strike from the Warren Road towards the village, and she was glad to know she was near it. Could the sound of her running feet have awakened some sleeping creature?—or what else was it she heard, which still further quickened her movements? It was like the ghost of a whistle, a low, unearthly sound, rising she knew not whence, and seeming, to her terror, to be at her very elbow. On she ran, and, oh! how thankful was she that the lane to the village was now fairly reached. For what was this coming towards her, down the

Warren Road from the opposite direction? She did not pause to look, but she saw: and in her haste, and in the dim light, the advancing figure seemed gigantic, and to come gliding forward, enveloped to its feet in a long black mantle.

Half sick with fear, she hurried on to escape as far as possible down the lane before the strange apparition should reach it. Nor did she then slacken her pace, but fled on, as one pursued.

The draper's shop was still open, but no purse had been left in it. The countrified shop-boy stared at Evelyn: struck by her breathless and terrified manner. She hastened on to the stationer's.

Better luck there. The purse had been found. The stationer had locked it up in his desk, meaning to restore it in the morning. He had gone out to a club meeting at the White Hart, his wife said, but he could be fetched at once. Evelyn made up her mind that, after all her trouble, she would not return home without it. So she took a chair and waited while the man was brought back. He was profuse in his apologies. He had done all for the best, and was shocked that the young lady should be kept out so late in consequence. Might he send his servant-girl back with her?

"No—no," Evelyn said, "the village way will be sociable enough. The Warren does seem rather wild and lonely."

"Well, yes," the man admitted, "though he knew the day when it was a favourite short cut. But it had got an ill name, somehow."

"How was that?" Evelyn inquired, with a curiosity very natural considering her recent experience.

"Well, it was hard to say," the stationer replied. "Years ago, an old labourer, rather weak in the head at the best of times, going home after a harvest-supper, said he saw—a dead person's ghost. Since that time there have been other whispers of the same kind."

"How do they know it is a ghost? Whose ghost do they think it is?" asked Evelyn.

The stationer shook his head. "Some say one thing and some another," he remarked. "I've never seen anything; I have no occasion to go that way after dark. Of course it is all folly, but it has made the Warren very lonely after sundown. People won't walk there."

"But whose ghost do they say it is?" persisted Evelyn.

The stationer was not to be entrapped. His questioner came from the Court.

"I've not heard much about it lately," he answered evasively. "It's not the sort of talk sensible people encourage. But you'll go home by the village, ma'am? Those that hold no belief in ghosts fancy there may be queer on-goings. And won't you take our girl for company? She's used to the walk."

Evelyn declined; and set off. Among the scattered houses of the high road she felt safe, and dared to reflect over her adventure. What was it that she had seen? And what had others seen?

"Whatever it be," was her sage conclusion, "it is popularly believed to have something to do with the Raven family. The stationer's reticence was due to the fact that I am living in it."

During Evelyn's prolonged absence Mrs. Raven had a restless time. At last she left the house, and crossed the lawn beside it, whence a field footpath led into the Warren Road. Not a sign of Evelyn. Mrs. Raven went on and on till she reached the little wicket-gate which opened upon the road itself.

Now, this field footpath ran along a high embankment, and the wicket opened on the top of half a dozen rude steps. Anybody standing there could see quite down the Warren Road, until it takes a bend near the corner, where it is cut by Ash Lane.

There was just enough of cloudy moonlight to let Mrs. Raven see that somebody was coming towards her from that direction. Of course, she thought at first that it was Evelyn. But as it drew nearer, she saw that it was a gigantic figure, draped in a heavy cloak, which on one side actually trailed on the ground. A cold horror thrilled through her, rooting her to the spot. Would the figure mount the steps? Would it essay to pass her? She could not stir. A terrible curiosity paralysed even fear.

At some paces off the figure paused, and slightly raised its hitherto bowed head. The face was ghastly pale. Could she really see, or did she only imagine a bright red blotch beneath the right ear? Slowly the tall form lifted its arm, stretched out a clenched fist and shook it in the direction of Ravenscourt—once—twice—thrice.

Then the arm dropped, the head drooped, and the figure again moved slowly forward. It drew near the steps; it passed them, passing down the road immediately beneath the embankment where Mrs. Raven stood. Yes! It was no fancy, she distinctly saw the red scar, the terrible red scar, which had disfigured her husband's long dead uncle, the bad Squire Eldred.

And where was Evelyn? At that thought Mrs. Raven could have dared the Warren Road itself, even with that mysterious form lurking in the darkness! But when the sudden tension of terror relaxed, she felt herself trembling in every limb. She must go back to the Court, or she would drop where she stood, perhaps faint away, and give cause for further mystery and excitement. Her heart was beating so fast, that she had to pause several times as she retraced her steps.

Once within the cheerful glow of light from the Court windows, she did not enter the house, but lingered outside on the terrace. She had not lingered long before she heard the light step for which she was listening come crisply up the avenue.

"I have the purse!" cried Evelyn, briskly. "Oh, Mrs. Raven, why have you waited outside on this chilly evening?"

Mrs. Raven did not directly answer the question. "I am so glad to see you," she said. "I am glad you came back by the highroad. I got quite nervous, thinking of you in the Warren: and until a few

moments ago it never crossed my mind that I might have sent a servant after you. It is lonely and eerie in the Warren : I daresay you found it so ?"

"I found the road there very damp and the ruts heavy," answered Evelyn, who had resolved not to speak to Mrs. Raven about her fright—first, because it might make that lady think her weakly superstitious, and second, because, probably, Mrs. Raven would not choose to be communicative on any scandal relating to the Court family.

"And you did not mind the loneliness !" said Mrs. Raven. "Well, I don't suppose one does mind loneliness, except that it makes one afraid of what may appear on the scene."

"What of harm is likely to appear in a peaceful English lane ?" asked Evelyn, jesuitically. "But I am so glad I got the purse !"

Surely the girl could have seen nothing ! And a new and strange fear sprang up in Mrs. Raven's breast. If she had heard of another's seeing what she herself had seen that evening, she would have unhesitatingly pronounced that other to be the victim of an hallucination, produced by fear, superstition, and perhaps a guilty conscience. Could it be that such judgment would be true of herself ? Yet she could not doubt her own eyes.

Oh, to be away at Coltburn ! among new scenes and faces, where the atmosphere would not be charged with mystery and terror.

"Why, mother !" said Leonard, as the two ladies joined him at the supper, "what have you been doing with yourself to-day ? How tired and ill you look !"

"I fear Mrs. Raven has been over-fatigued," explained Evelyn.

"That easily happens now !" sighed the widow. "I do indeed feel that it is time I enjoyed a little change !"

## CHAPTER XIX.

### EVELYN'S WHIM.

The telegram to Coltburn was sent, and a favourable and friendly answer returned in due course. Mrs. Raven seemed strangely excited. The few hours intervening before the starting time hung heavily upon her. She talked more to Evelyn during those few hours than she had ever talked before. She even spoke of Frank, and that in a way which rather puzzled her companion. She could not have spoken very differently had Evelyn been an heiress, and she an anxious mother, seeking to commend her son to favourable notice. Evelyn felt flattered, but, to own the truth, a little suspicious. She had none of the rash confidence of youth. Satan would not have disguised himself as an angel of light to deceive her : for she would but have suspected him the more. Mrs. Raven's sudden kindliness made her feel upon her guard.

Leonard did not accompany them to the railway station, but he

paid them, what was for him, the unusual attention of leaving his study chair and following them to the hall-door. He stood there, watching them drive off. He felt anxious about his mother: little matters seemed, nowadays, to stir her deeply.

"What makes her so excited now?" he mused. "Is she going really to see my aunt Connell, or my brother Frank? And what made her determine to go off in this desperate hurry? I can only think of one explanation," he added, inwardly, his face breaking into a saturnine smile, "and that is, that Mrs. Connell has daughters growing up! I don't remember my mother's general opinion on intermarriage between relations—but if it's intermarriage with the Connell family, I think I can imagine it!"

Mrs. Connell down at Coltburn did not feel quite satisfied with herself. Despite the cordiality with which she consented to her sister-in-law's coming, she was of too honest a nature to deny that there was bitterness in her heart. It seemed hard to find the olive branch of peace extended to her directly her brother was gone. It was his alienation alone which had really hurt her, and now, in this world, she could never be reconciled to him! If only her sister-in-law had been a little earlier in bringing about harmony, then, when death had entered the circle, Mrs. Connell felt she could have regarded and cherished her as a sacred charge. But now the dead stood between them. To complete the treaty of peace one voice was wanting, which could not answer to any call.

She fancied, too, that her husband might think this movement on Mrs. Raven's part proved that she had had no share in, perhaps no sympathy with, the long alienation of the past. Mrs. Connell knew better. She had known Mrs. Raven when they were both girls at school: she could easily conjure up the pale, serene child of those old days, who never did anything wrong, never disobeyed or flew in a passion, or disturbed the even tenor of life by any of the vagaries of love or hate; but who always got her own way, so quietly and gently, that anybody inclined to discuss the matter seemed at a hopeless disadvantage.

Mrs. Connell had ever been sure that the family separation would not have continued if Mrs. Raven's cool hand had not been kept on the door of her husband's heart. The late squire was not a man of stable purpose in either good or evil. She had tried to rejoice when he married Lydia Burke, feeling that her stern, cold character might supply what his lacked. There had always seemed reasons for accepting Lydia Burke—as a good girl, as a good woman. As a child, poor Mrs. Connell had always felt naughty for not liking her; as a woman, she had felt unjust, and now she felt unchristian.

"Is she jealous of Frank's being here?" she had said to her husband when Mrs. Raven's telegram arrived, though she reproached herself for the insinuation.

"My dear!" remonstrated the good minister, "the thought is

quite unworthy of you. Is it likely the lad would have visited us, if he had not known already that his mother's heart had turned our way?"

"Some fiend seems stirring up all the evil in me," sighed poor Mrs. Connell. "I suppose it's best to know it's there, as it is there. It will keep me humble at any rate."

But she was a frank woman, who had few feelings she wished to hide, and so she was not good in the art of concealing. Besides, she had always been accustomed to be glad to welcome guests—even utter strangers. So it seemed to her there must be something terribly wrong somewhere, now she felt no such gladness. If it was in herself, then out with it.

"It is odd, when one has been content to be apart so long, that one must come in such a hurry at last," she remarked to Philip. "And knowing that you are at home and that Frank is here, she might guess that the house is pretty full. Had she given me due notice, I might have had a new carpet for the best bed-room," she added, a glint of humour peeping through the cloud on her pleasant face. And Philip, laughing, answered in the same strain.

But the pain at Mrs. Connell's heart lay too deep and heavy to be lifted by badinage. "It is terrible to find one is not as good as one ought to be," she sighed, sitting down beside Alice Cleare in the dining-room to wait the arrival of her guests when the last preparations were complete. And the placid serenity of the young governess, and the something hidden beneath the sweet cheer of her countenance, soothed the troubled spirit of Mrs. Connell.

"But it would be worse not to find it out, wouldn't it?" asked Alice, brightly.

"Well, my dear, I suppose it would," assented Mrs. Connell. "I feel as if you were one of ourselves, although you have been with us so short a time; and I daresay you have gathered that I and my sister-in-law, Lydia—Mrs. Raven, who is coming—have not seen each other or been on friendly terms for years; not since I was married."

"Miss Connell told me about it," replied Alice, softly.

"Well, my dear," Mrs. Connell went on, "all of us, including myself and my husband—and he and I have often said so to each other—might have been wiser than we were in the past days, and far less hasty. But it did seem very hard when year after year went by, and my brother never forgave us. For he and I had been close friends. And now, you see, my dear, it is all ended for him. And I can't feel quite glad to see his wife without him. I almost wish she had stayed away altogether!"

"But I am sure you were delighted when young Mr. Raven came," suggested Alice.

"Ay, so I was!" and the elder lady looked at the girl with tear-moistened eyes. "That seemed different. Frank was born long after the dissension arose. And my poor brother did once invite my boy Philip to spend a few days at Ravenscourt, which looked as if he

did not want the coolness to descend to another generation. But as he and his wife always kept apart from us while he lived, why need she come now? If it was his wish not to heed us, why doesn't his wish bind her still? It seems to me, now, as if in this too tardy reconciliation, I lose my brother more than in the silence he willed once, and never afterwards broke."

"Don't you think it is best to seek only for what is right to be done?" asked Alice timidly. "The dead have surely risen into higher light and better knowledge than ours, and therefore, the more we strive to do the right, the nearer we must get to their present wishes and feelings for us here."

Mrs. Connell sat silently, with a relaxing of the hard lines that had gathered about her mouth. "That is a hopeful idea," she said, presently. "It turns the most sensitive regard for the dead into a stimulus for life, instead of a weight upon it. Thank you, my dear."

And the kind woman thought within herself, "This young thing must have suffered a great deal to have gained these ideas. I wonder if we leave her lonely in her sorrows, even by our very delicacy in not mentioning them? It is odd and sad to think how little we know of the brother for whom she wears mourning. I don't know when he died, or where he died. I only know that she has no near kinsfolk in this country now."

And Alice Cleare, by her side, bent over her work, and longed to lay her head on the shoulder of this motherly woman, who had had her own temptations, her own struggle, but whose stream of life was kept pure and clear. What more might have passed between them was stopped by the sound of wheels—a carriage was drawing up at the door. The travellers had arrived.

It was Philip and Frank who had gone together to the station to meet them. And it was Frank alone who led Mrs. Raven into the dining-room, closely followed by Evelyn Agate.

Mrs. Raven took in the whole scene at a glance. It seemed to photograph itself on her mind; never, in its smallest detail, to be forgotten. How little her sister-in-law had changed through all those years, which must have been so hard and careful! And this young girl beside her—this must be one of the daughters of the house, of whom Leonard had rightly guessed that his mother would think in connection with Frank. Mrs. Raven said something to this effect, after she had saluted Mrs. Connell.

"No, no," explained the hostess, "this is not Louisa. This young lady is Miss Cleare, my little girls' governess."

"Oh, you must pardon my mistake!" cried Mrs. Raven. But she looked again at Alice Cleare. It is hard to eradicate a first impression, however erroneous, and in her mind, most unreasonably, her idea of Frank's possible admiration for a "cousin" fastened itself at once upon the unknown girl, never before heard of.

Neither Mrs. Raven nor Evelyn found anything to complain of

in the welcome they received. The Connells so abounded in hospitality, that it might fall several degrees below its normal standard without striking people as chill or limited.

Mrs. Raven might miss nothing in Mrs. Connell's assiduous attentions when the party had re-assembled in the dining-room, to partake of a substantial meal, half tea, half dinner, but that poor lady was herself conscious of their formality and constraint, and felt quite glad when the young Italian, Marco Learli, was shown in.

"What a blessing it is to love and serve!" thought Mrs. Connell. "Even to be loved and served is nothing to it!"

Her children had not exaggerated the young foreigner's appearance of melancholy and ill-health. Percy thought he had even grown worse since his arrival at Coltburn. He was so changed that Mrs. Connell's kind heart ached for him. She asked why he had not come before—he had been in the town a day or two. But Learli said he had been busy: just now he had a good deal of foreign correspondence to attend to. And then they introduced him to the visitors.

It touched Mrs. Connell to see how he took refuge with her, rather than with her children. For it was to her side he drew a chair, when pressed to join the meal. It never occurred to her for one instant that Louisa could be pained that he did not seek the seat by *her* side. The mother thought of the whole party as children, just as mothers are always so apt to do. It was true that Louisa was not much younger than were her other daughters when they had been sought in marriage; but then Marco was so different from the sons-in-law who had carried them off—the one a bluff and prosperous gentleman-farmer, the other a shrewd solicitor—that Mrs. Connell had never thought of him as a possible suitor. In her eyes he was but a boy, unfortunate in being exiled from his own land.

When the tea was nearly over, and the restless little ones were leaving their seats, Mrs. Connell called Evelyn to her other side, and laid out all her gentle wiles to win the two young strangers into pleasant chatter. She had not much difficulty with Evelyn. In fact, that young lady proved herself a great acquisition at the table, where nobody at first had seemed quite to know what to say, except herself and Philip. Evelyn was in high feather. Even as Mrs. Raven's companion, she felt she might rank with Mrs. Raven's humbler relations; and, besides that, her acquaintance with Philip and Frank, especially with Philip, made it seem almost as if she were the guest of the house in her own right.

She knew more of Philip's London surroundings than did his own people, and she knew how to give forth her knowledge graciously, not sparing a little bright raillery concerning some of his manners and customs, yet always creating a favourable impression. Mr. Connell and Louisa were delighted with her, and Mrs. Connell felt that one of her protégés was safely launched on the social stream, leaving her more free to devote herself to the less facile young Italian.

Suddenly Evelyn glanced across, and caught his eyes fixed upon her. She had scarcely observed him before: he was boyish in appearance, and she took him for a mere boy. Now she changed her opinion. It was evident, also, that something in herself had attracted him; and Evelyn was always open to that. So as soon as the hum of conversation went on again, supported this time by Philip Connell and Mrs. Raven, she turned to her next neighbour, Percy, and made inquiries in a whisper.

"Has your friend yonder been long in this country? Does he speak Italian?"

"He only left Italy two years ago, Miss Agate, so I conclude he does," was Percy's answer. "As we do not speak much of it ourselves, you see, we never tested him."

Evelyn bent forward and addressed the young man in Italian. She merely asked him to which of his country's beautiful cities he owed special allegiance.

He started and coloured vividly as he answered her. It was no mere boyish embarrassment: it was as the dead might leap back into life. In truth, Marco Learli seemed no longer "a mere boy" to Evelyn, but to be suddenly endowed with those ideal attributes which painters and sculptors accord to beings of poetry or patriotism.

"I have made a great conquest," mused Evelyn Agate. "And an easy one."

"Oh, how I wish I had been able to speak Italian!" thought Louisa Connell, passionately. "What pleasure those few words in his own tongue have given him!—and how kind it was of her to think of it! And with all my poor efforts to understand Italian politics and to appreciate Italian poetry through translations, I never set myself in earnest to learn the language! I wonder how long it would take me if I began now? I wonder if Miss Agate would give me a little help in it?"

Mrs. Raven did not care to move when tea was being cleared away. She felt very chilly after her journey, she said, and the dining-room was pleasantly warm. Mr. and Mrs. Connell of course remained with her. But the young people went off. They wanted the piano and the albums. Marco Learli had seemed so greatly aroused and interested since he heard his native tongue, that Mrs. Connell felt quite at ease about him, and he followed the retiring party. Evidently he would not be dull or lonely now.

"Have you been to consult the Oriental Mystery yet, Learli?" began Percy, as soon as they were in the drawing-room and out of hearing of their elders: Mr. Percy's brain being just now full of that sole topic.

Learli's face flushed again—a very different flush from the earlier one. "What will the ladies think of me, if you ask such a question?"

"The ladies would be only too glad to go themselves, if they could get a chance," returned the young man.

"Nay, you are wrong, I think, Mr. Percy," quickly spoke Alice Cleare, with gentle emphasis. "I know I should not go."

Evelyn turned and looked at her superciliously. She did not intend to be drawn into any camaraderie with this governess. If rank, or, let us say, social opinions, had set no distinction between them, then with the more subtlety must she herself draw every other possible line of demarcation. It would be delightful to contradict the girl at once.

"What is it?" she asked, turning from Alice to Marco and Percy; and, with pretty affectation, repeating her question in Italian.

"Nothing in the least worthy of her attention," was Marco's assurance to the young lady. But Percy was not to be silenced.

"It's a witch," he said; "a curious woman who appeared in the town a day or two ago. She will tell you your real name when she doesn't know it, and perhaps when you don't know it, and she'll tell you what kind of life you have lived, and future things that are going to happen. And, Miss Agate ——" But here Mr. Percy pulled himself up, suddenly remembering what Philip had mentioned about Mrs. Raven's companion—that she was only a foundling and did not know her true name.

Evelyn laughed softly. "Does she understand palmistry?"

"I expect she understands anything you ask her about," Percy answered, with a queer change from enthusiasm to half-heartedness, as he recalled certain words of his father's, touching the special temptations and dangers of the nameless and forsaken.

Evelyn spoke again. "You have consulted her yourself, I gather. Do you think her clever?"

"It was all very strange: yes, quite odd and unaccountable," he replied. He did not like to go straight back from his own words, or he would have liked to say that nevertheless there was not much in the revelations he had received. Alice Cleare, half laughing, spoke.

"Mr. Percy heard his own name and that visitors were coming here."

Evelyn looked at her again; superciliously. "How I should like to go to this strange woman!" she said. "Should not you, Miss Connell? I don't see why gentlemen should keep all these investigations to themselves. They are much more easily deceived than we are likely to be—especially by a witch!"

"Possibly a wizard would have more power over you ladies," laughed Philip. "As for us, to be bewitched is sometimes our highest ambition."

"Be serious, please," said Evelyn; "I am. Miss Connell, will you come?"

Louisa hardly knew what to answer. "I fear my father would not approve of it," she said, with hesitation. "I should like to go—like it of all things—but ——"

"But if you could have had such an opportunity when away from

home, as I am," put in Evelyn, "would you then have thought it necessary to ask permission before availing yourself of the chance?"

The question sounded innocent enough. Perhaps only Philip and Alice saw its drift. To wit: that a licence that might be almost accidentally taken under one set of circumstances might surely be taken under another.

"I don't know—that might be a little different," faltered Louisa, who in truth was feverishly longing for the expedition.

Philip came to the rescue. "I shall be most happy to accompany you, Miss Agate," he said. "I intended to go on my own account."

"Oh, but of course I shall not go unless Miss Connell goes," returned Evelyn. "What is not proper for her, cannot be proper for me." She did not disguise her tone of disappointment. She fully intended, coûte qui coûte, to go to the fortune-teller herself—the woman might have magic powers and be able to enlighten her on things that she longed to know. But how could she go decently without the countenance of the daughter of the house?—Mrs. Raven might take umbrage at it. "I hope you *will* go, Miss Connell. To oblige me."

"Do you think I might venture?" Louisa pleaded, looking at her brothers. Could she ask Evelyn for help in learning Italian if she disregarded this request, Louisa began asking herself by way of excuse or sophistry.

"I will escort you both, if that may take the gloss off the offence," said Philip. "Under those circumstances, if it were found out, I think it would be forgiven; you could lay the blame on me." Philip expected to get far more fun out of Evelyn there than out of the witch, and he did not see much harm in taking Louisa.

"Oh, don't go!" cried Alice Cleare and Marco Learli, both in one breath.

"And why not, pray?" asked Evelyn. Her tone was mocking, but her smile was sweet—the one was for Alice, the other was turned on Marco.

The young Italian waved his hand deprecatingly. "Why try to peep between the pages of Fate?" he murmured. "What is to be, will be. And the good cannot tarry beyond its appointed hour, and the evil will come too soon."

"Then you believe such people as this woman may have genuine occult power of some sort?" exclaimed Evelyn. "You make me only the more curious to see her! Forgive me, Signor, but I am very ignorant of these matters. You must know more, or you would not believe so much. I want to be initiated too; help me, and then I shall probably agree with you."

"Alice Cleare is altogether incredulous," remarked Louisa, whose timid opposition was dying down into an easy assent. "And so of course am I—or I certainly would not go. I should not like to tamper with the unknown and mysterious—let alone what papa might say."

"Then, again, don't go, for that you are certainly doing," pleaded Alice. "If there exist facts of this sort beyond our present understanding, then wilful trifling with them is like playing with drugs whose very atmosphere may be deadly. If this woman is self-deceived, you are but increasing a melancholy delusion; and if she is, as you seem to think, a conscious impostor, you would be venturing within the influence of an evil and dangerous nature."

"Oh, Miss Cleare, say more!—though if they will not heed you, they will not listen to me!" cried young Learli, with a strange intensity.

"Dear me! It is quite delightful to do wrong; it seems to make one interesting to onlookers!" smiled Evelyn. "Why need Mr. Learli care what we do, Miss Connell, you or I?"

A pang shot through Louisa's heart. How should a stranger see trace of any special attachment between Learli and herself? It had not been so at Sandgate, when friends and acquaintances, not being so blind and deaf as dear Mrs. Connell, had not chosen to be dumb either.

"Why indeed?" she responded, with a rather sickly smile.

"Let us pay the visit as soon as possible," said Evelyn, eagerly. "Can it be after breakfast to-morrow? Then no gossip about us can have reached the woman, especially about me. Nobody in Coltburn knows anything of me, except your elder brother. If the witch is too clever," she added, turning to Philip, "I shall accuse you of being in league with her."

"With all my heart," laughed Philip. "And what are you thinking about all this time?" added the young barrister, turning suddenly on his silent cousin Frank.

Frank started and reddened. "I am thinking of nothing," he said. "Nothing in particular."

What had he been thinking? He could scarcely tell that himself. Chiefly, perhaps, of Alice Cleare!

Presently, when he and Alice were talking together a little apart of their past meeting, the mention of the strange figure she had seen in the Raven lanes that same night somehow came up.

"Have you found out what it was?" she asked him.

"No," said Frank. "But I have been away from Ravenscourt ever since. You are quite sure it was real?"

Alice laughed. "How can I tell? I suppose I ought to be sure of it. I own I was sadly frightened. It was the strangest figure possible, and I am sure I should know it again anywhere. It was pure fear of it which gave me the courage to speak to you."

"Then Heaven bless that wandering soul, be it in the body or out of it!" said Frank earnestly, in the moment's impulse.

He thought they were quite away from the others, and started to find Marco Learli at his elbow.

(*To be continued.*)

# PRUDENCE HART.

By Georgiana M. Craik.

"WELL, she is a demure little soul," said Keith Verner, "and not much of a beauty certainly."

Upon which Mrs. Verner replied with decision: "She is quite as much of a beauty, my dear, as there is any need for her to be." And the young man, at that response, laughed.

They were speaking of some one who had just left the room—Miss Prudence Hart, a young person who had entered the Verners' family only two days before, to fill the post of companion to Mrs. Verner's only daughter, Mabel. Mabel Verner was nineteen, and was in not very robust health. She was a little fanciful too, and had of late developed a certain fretfulness, with which her mother, who was an active and cheerful woman, had not much sympathy.

"The child tries me exceedingly," she had often said to her husband. "She has everything to make her happy, and yet she is not happy. I wonder," she had suggested one day, lately, "how it would answer to give her some companion of her own age?"

"What, another girl?" asked Mr. Verner. "Well, that is not a bad idea."

"I have had it in my mind for some time," continued Mrs. Verner thoughtfully. "The only objection is that there might be some difficulty with the boys."

"Oh, not the least fear of that!" exclaimed her husband in a tone amazement. "The boys, you may be sure, would like it."

"I have little doubt that they would like it," Mrs. Verner answered shortly. "What I fear is that they might like it too well. If it were not that they are so little here ——"

"Ah, yes, that makes all the difference," he assented.

"If they were living at home I should not think of such an arrangement for a moment, but seeing how much they are away, I am disposed to think that the plan might be tried; especially if we could find some nice quiet girl, not very good looking," said Mrs. Verner.

And then something of the nature of a protest rose to her husband's lips; but, on reflection, he did not utter it.

Soon after this, Mrs. Verner, having consulted with her daughter, and received Mabel's assent to her scheme, began to make known amongst her acquaintances that she wished to receive into her house some young person of a modest and staid demeanour, in consequence of which numerous young persons were proposed to her, and from amongst these various candidates she finally selected one who seemed in a happy degree to combine the several qualifications that she most

desired to secure. For, by the lady who recommended her, Prudence Hart was certified to be cheerful, clever, domestic, of a sweet temper, and with regard to propriety and modesty of deportment, all that the most anxious mother could demand.

And then, to sum up all, she was not handsome. Mrs. Verner saw her with her own eyes, and could testify to the fact. "A pleasant face: yes, I should call it decidedly pleasant, healthy and fresh, but with no pretensions to good looks," she stated with decision to her husband, speaking of Miss Hart before the young lady took up her abode with them. "A nice, plain, retiring, lady-like looking girl—just the sort of person I had in my mind. Mrs. Prescott speaks of her in the warmest way. She says we shall find she will be a comfort to us all."

"Well, that is, I suppose, assuming we shall be in need of comfort?" suggested Mr. Verner: but his wife did not respond to this uncalled for remark.

It was turning dark on a spring evening when the fly, that had brought Miss Hart and her luggage from the station, drew up before Mrs. Verner's hall door.

"Will you take my two portmanteaus in, if you please? The fare is three-and-sixpence," said the young lady, and paid the money and entered the house.

The next moment she saw Mabel coming across the hall to meet her, and she put out her hand with a little smile.

"How do you do?" Mabel said. "I am afraid you are cold. We had hoped you would come by an earlier train, you know."

"This has been a very nice train," answered Prudence, "and I like arriving at places in the evening."

And then Mabel took her to her mother, who was waiting to receive her in the drawing-room.

Miss Hart was a young woman of apparently two or three and twenty, with a placid, rounded face, and glossy hair, divided in the middle, and put smoothly back from a broad low forehead. The forehead and head were good, and the eyes fairly handsome, but the rest of the features were homely enough.

"I call her plain, decidedly," Mabel said, after she had been in her company for an hour.

"Yes, my dear," replied her mother, "I told you she was plain: but I don't consider that that is any drawback."

And then Mabel said, "Perhaps not," but thought at the same time in her heart that it *was* a drawback, for Mabel was pretty herself, and cared enough for her beauty to fancy that life would not be worth much without it.

The day after Miss Hart's arrival the girls spent a good deal of time together, and Mabel found her new companion pleasant enough. "She talks a good deal when she is alone with me," she told her mother, "and she can be amusing too. I rather like her. I dare-

say, you know, she feels less shy with me than she does with papa and you."

"Very probably," answered Mrs. Verner suavely. "That is only natural." And she went presently to her desk, and wrote a grateful note to Mrs. Prescott, telling her that Miss Hart had arrived, and that so far she gave entire satisfaction.

"And certainly I have every reason as yet to be pleased with the result of our experiment," she said complacently to her husband at night.

To which Mr. Verner replied, "H'm—she is an odd little person. She won't contribute very much, I suspect, to the general liveliness of the house."

"She will contribute probably quite as much to it as it is at all desirable she should do," replied Mrs. Verner with emphasis. "A prominent, showy sort of girl would not, I consider, have been at all the kind of person to suit us."

"Well no—no, I daresay not," assented Mr. Verner. "I only meant to say that she was not particularly attractive."

"And is there any necessity," inquired his wife, "why she *should* be particularly attractive? It seems to me that there is every reason, on the contrary, why she should be rather the reverse. There is Keith, remember, coming out to-morrow night ——"

"Well, my dear, you need give yourself no concern about Keith. *He* won't be smitten with her," replied Mr. Verner, and went his way laughing.

And in fact, when Keith Verner came out the following evening, he was certainly *not* smitten with her.

Keith was the eldest of Mr. Verner's two sons; the other was named Godfrey, and they were both at this time walking the hospitals in London. But though they lived in London, they came down nearly always once a week to their father's house at Tunbridge Wells, and sometimes even more frequently.

On this occasion Keith had come out by himself, and before he took his leave next morning he said to his sister Mabel, "I don't think much of your new friend."

"I believe she returns the compliment," replied Mabel, "for, to judge by what she has said, I should not imagine that she thought much of you."

"What do you mean that she has said?" inquired Keith, pricking up his ears at this, and rather taken aback, for the young man set some store on himself.

And then Mabel laughed, and informed him by degrees that Miss Hart had asked if he was not conceited, and rather idle, and had also implied a suspicion in regard to the depth of his acquirements—which, with sisterly frankness, Mabel remarked that she did not consider ill-founded by any means.

"Well, upon my word!" exclaimed Keith, with what was perhaps, in the circumstances, not unnatural warmth.

"Oh, she is very acute," said Mabel. "You would not think it, but she notices a good many things."

"And apparently she imagines a good many more," retorted Keith: and then, having no more time to spare, he curtly bade good-bye to his sister, and hurried to his train. But as he walked hastily down the road he did not forget Miss Hart. "The impertinent little minx!" he said to himself. "That is the worst of these half-bred people; they mistake flippancy for wit; and, now that Mabel has got it into her head that this girl is clever, I foresee there will be no end to the way in which she will encourage her. But wait till I see her again!" And with this vague menace, which conveyed a certain sense of satisfaction to him, Keith bent his steps back to town.

A couple of days afterwards, at the end of the week, the two brothers came down to Tunbridge Wells together.

"I don't think much of that girl my mother has brought into the house," Keith had already said to Godfrey. "I don't know how others may feel, but to me she seems no lady."

"Well, half the governesses going are not ladies, you know," returned Godfrey. "This girl is not a governess exactly, I suppose; but it's all one."

"I think they should have been more particular in their choice," said Keith. "There are plenty of nice girls they might have got. Miss Hart, to begin with, is as ugly as sin."

"That is a bad business anyway," replied Godfrey.

And, impressed by this fact, when Saturday came he went down to his father's, not expecting to experience much delight from his introduction to his sister's friend.

But Keith, on his part, felt a decided curiosity to see the young lady again. It had become quite clear to his mind that a girl who was capable of speaking about him to Mabel in the way in which Mabel had asserted she had spoken, was a girl who required to be taken down, and he was eager, with the natural eagerness of a virtuous mind, to set himself about this necessary work. So he began by greeting her when they met in the most chilling way, and then kept his attention on the alert, that he might be ready, whenever the first opportunity offered, to put her down as she deserved.

But the hours passed, and Miss Hart was so quiet that the opportunity for which he watched was slow to come. She sat at the dinner table, and in the drawing-room, the most unobtrusive of women, hardly speaking unless she was addressed, and speaking then only in the most modest way. She was bright and alert, but her alertness showed itself in acts, not words: she was quick to perform little services, to bring a footstool to his mother's feet, to place his father's newspaper beside him, to play Mabel's accompaniments when she sang, and set in order the things Mabel left awry; but all this was done in the quietest way, and accompanied for the most part

only by little deprecating, inquiring, grateful, or kindly smiles, that it would have been next to impossible to take offence at.

"She seems to get on very well with them all, certainly," Keith thought to himself, "and to be very amiable and well-meaning. If it were not that Mabel is a girl who tells the truth ——"

But then Mabel essentially was a girl who told the truth, and so Keith was perplexed.

Late in the evening he came suddenly on Miss Hart standing alone out of doors by the verandah, looking at the stars. This seemed to him odd, for he was not romantic, and never went star-gazing himself; in fact, her occupation appeared to him so queer a one that he peered at her inquiringly when he came upon her in the dark, and said, "Hallo!" He had come out to smoke a cigar, and was not thinking of the stars.

"Why—I say, aren't you cold here?" he exclaimed next moment.

"Cold in this sweet air?" she asked. She looked at him and laughed. "I have been fainting indoors with your closed windows all night."

"Well, you have not looked like it then," he replied bluntly.

"You are saying that at hazard. You don't know how I have looked," the young lady rejoined.

"Why should I not know? Do you think I have not eyes?" he asked.

And then she laughed again, very softly and with a peculiar tone, and made no other response.

She was rather a small woman, with a firm rounded figure, not sylph-like, but pretty in its way, and she dressed well. She had been standing in the shadow when he first spoke to her, but she came out a step or two beyond the verandah after his last question, and, as the night was not a dark one, he could see something of her face then.

He waited for a few moments after she had laughed, looking at her as he waited with some attention, and then—

"I don't see the fun," he abruptly said.

"Very likely not," she answered. "I did not expect that you would.

"Well, upon my word!" said Keith.

Perhaps, as Prudence Hart had chosen to say, Keith Verner was conceited, but there were enough good qualities in him, in spite of his conceit, to make him likeable. He was tall and well-looking; he was in general kindly and pleasant. It was, to tell the truth, something rather new to him to find himself snubbed, and, above all, it was new to find himself snubbed by a girl whose natural attitude towards him ought, as he considered, to be one of deference and respect. He looked at her for a moment, and then he made up his mind that the thing must be put a stop to. She mistook her place. He was a gentleman, as he was abundantly aware, and she was—not quite a lady: he must therefore give a lesson to her.

So he let the better part of a minute pass, and then, having taken that time to arrange his words, he delivered himself of a grave and, as he flattered himself, a rather dignified speech.

"I don't know from what you draw your conclusions, Miss Hart," he said, "but, seeing that you have only been acquainted with me for a very short time, will you allow me to say that I think you assume in yourself a power of judging me that I am obliged to request the liberty to dispute?"

"What makes you suppose that I assume any power of judging you?" she replied to this address, composedly, but bringing her eyes as she spoke with rather a sudden movement down to his face from the stars.

"You did it just now," he said quickly; and then he added, not perhaps quite wisely, "and you have done it before."

"Indeed?" she returned inquiringly.

"I think you can hardly deny it?" he said.

"If you will tell me to what you refer"—she spoke quite pleasantly—"then perhaps I shall be able to understand you."

"I refer to the opinion which you did me the honour to express about me to my sister a few days ago."

"And which she has repeated to you?"

"Yes, she has repeated it to me."

"As she has also to me repeated yours about myself. Mr. Keith, I am very happy to be able to meet your charge with a counter-charge." And then Miss Hart softly chafed her hands, and laughed in his face.

Keith, who did not relish being made ridiculous, felt very hot while Miss Hart's mocking little laugh rang on the air, and if he could have said something to silence her he would unquestionably have said it with a will; but sharp-edged words unhappily will not always come at need, and so in the sudden pause while he remained discomfited, Miss Hart first amused herself with her mocking laughter, and then, being for her own part quite cool and mistress of herself, proceeded quietly to make another speech.

"I always find that it is wisest to have very clean hands before I indulge in accusations," she said. "But perhaps, Mr. Keith, you are too young to have learnt that lesson yet? If so, you ought to be grateful to me for teaching it to you. And now I will go in, and leave you to smoke your cigar in peace."

And she went accordingly, quite unmoved by the clumsy, "Oh come! I say!" which were the only ejaculations that the exigency of the moment had power to force from Keith's unready lips.

He said to himself presently, "I'll be even with her yet!" But for the remainder of this evening, at any rate, she gave him no chance of being even with her. When he saw her next, she was kneeling at his mother's feet, picking up a stitch that Mrs. Verner had dropped in her knitting, with such an expression of sweet absorption in her

face that she looked an incarnation of all the domestic virtues, and never until she bade him good night, either purposely or by accident, did she allow herself to come within speaking distance of him again.

He, on his part, however, was pursued a good deal by the thought of her, and found himself watching her almost against his will. Also, which was curious, when Mabel spoke to him next about Miss Hart, as she did upon the following morning, expatiating on her character with much frankness as she walked by his side to church, he made no return of confidences, and Mabel remained in complete ignorance of the little passage at arms that he and Prudence had had together the previous night. In fact, he made no mention at all of that encounter in the garden.

"You have seen so little of her yet," Mabel said to him; "but in spite of her plainness, I do really think you will like her in time, for I am sure she is clever. You have no idea how observant she is! I am afraid to tell mamma, for I am not sure if she would like it; but she is such a mimic that she sometimes makes me die of laughing. It is a pity that she is not prettier, is it not? I think sometimes that if she were nice looking she might be very effective. You consider her quite plain, I suppose?" said Mabel, looking up inquiringly to Keith's face, and perhaps not longing very ardently to hear her suggestion disallowed.

But Keith hesitated a little.

"Oh, well, I don't know. I thought her plain at first," he said. "But she has got good points, you know."

"She has good eyes," said Mabel, dubiously.

"Yes, and she knows it," exclaimed Keith, with enough fervour to make Mabel open her own fine orbs.

"What makes you think that?" she asked rather quickly.

"Oh, I meant nothing. I thought she played them off a little—that is all," he said.

"You don't mean in a coquettish way?" asked Mabel, severely. "If you think that, you are wrong altogether. Oh no," and she shook her head with decision; "she is no coquette. She does not care about men a bit."

"Has she told you so?" asked Keith, bluntly.

"Yes, of course she has," said Mabel. "But I should know it even without her saying anything. She is always laughing at them. She does not care in the least about getting married. Perhaps, to be sure," added Miss Verner, reflectively, "that may be partly because she does not think she is likely to have any lovers."

Keith did not have any talk with Miss Hart during the morning of this day, but rather late in the afternoon, as he happened at one time to be crossing the hall, he heard a sound of singing coming from the drawing-room, and, putting his head cautiously in at the half-open door, he perceived Prudence's small figure seated on the

music-stool. On which he debated with himself for two or three moments, and at the end of that time entered, and listened till the song ceased.

He had come in, as he thought, in the most noiseless way, but yet the young lady, by the time her performance ended, seemed to be quite conscious of his presence, for, without turning her head, she said, as she struck the final chord:

"That is Handel. But I don't sing well. You ought not to listen to me."

"Then you should not sing in a room with the door open," he replied.

"I left the door open in order to keep people away," she said.

"Well, you see," he answered, "it has had the opposite effect." And then, as he moved a little nearer to her he laughed, and added, "Which perhaps does not surprise you very much."

But if he had had any hope that this retort would embarrass her, he was disappointed. She merely looked at him for a moment with, apparently, an entire want of comprehension in her eyes, and then, vouchsafing no reply, rose up and began to survey her hands.

"I shall never play well. I can't, you see," she said. "They are too small."

"They are very small, certainly," he answered. And then he looked at them too. "Very small, and—very pretty."

"They are like my mother's," she said, pensively.

"Have you got a mother?" he asked.

She shook her head and sighed.

"Oh no; I was unhappy enough to lose her long ago," she replied. "She died when I was quite a child. And I have lost my father too. I am both fatherless and motherless."

"Oh dear," exclaimed Keith, sympathetically.

He did really for the moment feel sorry for her. It was so clear that she needed somebody to look after her, he thought.

She had folded her hands and was standing gazing thoughtfully on the ground. They were both silent for a few moments, during which he occupied himself in regarding her, and then—beginning to find the silence a little awkward—

"Well, I hope you will be comfortable here," he said, abruptly and good-naturedly. "It won't be my mother's fault, I think, if you don't soon feel at home."

"Oh no, I don't think it will; I believe that thoroughly," she replied with earnestness. "Your family have been very kind to me, Mr. Keith. Your mother, and your father, and Mabel have all been kindness itself. Even your brother Godfrey was good enough to talk to me for a quarter of an hour last night quite affably."

Poor Keith's blood mounted to his face. If the soft little fingers had slapped his cheek he could hardly have felt more hot.

"Now—I say!" he broke out, stammering, "upon my word that's

too bad! And so you mean to say that *I* am the only one—that *I* treat you differently from all the rest?"

"Oh no—I am saying nothing about *you* at all," she replied, lifting up her eyes suddenly with a smile in them that seemed to him as cold as a steel blade. "That would be a piece of presumption, after your rebuke last night, that I should be sorry to be guilty of."

"Miss Hart, you are an awfully sarcastic woman!" he exclaimed. "How is one ever to know how to have you? To say such a thing as that to a fellow is enough to knock him down."

"There is not the least fear of your being knocked down," she replied, with a little sudden scornful laugh. "Some people's words, I daresay, might have an effect of that kind upon you, but not mine."

But all at once, as she made this answer, she smiled, and the smile had a curious unexpected sweetness in it that struck the young man with surprise. For a moment, the face that he had been calling plain looked, to his eyes, almost beautiful. And then, before he had more than half recovered from this first change in her, there came a second, which completed his amazement.

"You seem to look upon me as a very designing person," she said, abruptly, with her eyes, full of their new expression, fixed on his face, "and instead of that I am only a lonely girl, who has been left to herself a great deal, and who has no home except what your people give me, and no friends except ——" And then she stopped, and the pause and the unfinished sentence were very eloquent. But before he could reply she had suddenly passed by him, and slipped through the open French window, and was lost to view.

After this Keith spent a quiet evening. The girls went to church again, but he did not go any more to church. They did not, however, lack an attendant on their way back, for Godfrey, when service was over, appeared at the church door, and escorted them home. "I thought you were going over to Mr. Marshall's, Godfrey?" Mabel said to him, when he met them, but the young man only laughed, and answered that he had changed his mind. And then he set himself at Prudence's side, and talked to her, and Mabel took her walk home, listening, and perhaps in some surprise.

The next morning, as the two young men went back to town, Godfrey said abruptly to his brother, with a laugh—

"Well, I think my mother has caught a Tartar. Of all the uncompromising flirts I ever came across, I have never known one to beat that girl!"

"Oh—what—*you* think that too, do you?" said Keith. "Why? has she been talking to you?"

"Talking to me! I should just think she had," answered Godfrey.

"But I don't know when you were together," said Keith, quickly. "I never saw you with her."

"What does that prove? I never saw *you* with her," retorted Godfrey.

And then Keith, knowing that undoubtedly, as far as he was concerned, that fact proved nothing, held his peace.

"I think certainly she is a flirt," he agreed, after a few moments' silence; "and it is a pity, for the others don't seem to have a notion of it."

"Well, it will do them no harm not to know. Don't you say anything to them," exclaimed Godfrey, "for she is splendid fun. What a pretty little minx she is, too! I thought with you at first that she was plain, but, by Jove, she knows how to make the most of herself."

"She is a very odd girl," said Keith, gravely. "I am afraid she is not a very good companion for Mabel."

"Oh, Mabel can take care of herself," answered the younger brother, carelessly. "Besides, she wants shaking up, and Miss Hart is just the sort of person to give her a fillip. There is no real harm in her—at least, I don't think there is. She is a thorough-paced flirt, that's all."

"Well, but that is bad enough, I suppose," said Keith.

Keith was a little uneasy as he went to his work that day. He had a strong suspicion that he ought to give his mother some hint of the special proclivities that he and Godfrey had discovered in Miss Hart, and yet he could not bear to hurt the girl by doing it. Mrs. Verner would have her out of the house at once if she knew, he thought. And then he remembered how Prudence had said to him that she had no other home than this one, and how she had looked when she had said that she was lonely and friendless, and he felt that he could not do it.

So he made up his mind that he would say nothing, and that till the end of the week, at any rate, he would put the matter out of his thoughts; and accordingly, to the best of his power, he did this; but yet before the week ended he found himself becoming very curious to learn how she would conduct herself to him when he saw her next.

With a certain undeniable interest he waited for Saturday to come, and to tell the truth, when it arrived, and when, as he entered in at the gate of his father's house, he recognised at some fifty paces from him a small grey figure flitting amongst the trees, the first impulse unquestionably was to bend his steps in its direction, for the small grey figure was Miss Prudence Hart taking solitary exercise in the sunny afternoon. But, after a little pause, he continued his straight walk to the house. Godfrey, in his place, would have done differently; but Keith had scruples that were ignored by his younger brother.

Though he had scruples, however, about showing ardour in seeking Miss Hart's society, it was by no means his intention to exclude himself from any future intercourse with that young lady. On the contrary, he had by this time assured himself that it was his duty, in a quiet way, to learn what more of her he could, in order to place himself in a position to give such advice concerning her (supposing that

advice were necessary) as ought to be looked for from an elder son and brother. Without further loss of time, therefore, he set himself about this virtuous work, and continued it with laudable perseverance through week after week of the advancing spring and early summer, for it proved to be an undertaking of an arduous sort, requiring (or, at least, so he thought) much time for its due carrying out.

As these weeks went on, Prudence showed herself to him in various moods. He saw a good deal of her, and she was sometimes (though not often) silent and demure; she was generally irritating and more or less mocking; she was occasionally gentle and womanly; and in all her moods, except perhaps the first, she got the better of him. They had many encounters together, and she beat him in every one of them. She was ten times cleverer than he was—ten times readier—ten times more daring. And he said to himself again and again, "She is not the kind of woman they think she is; she is not such a girl as it can do Mabel any good to be intimate with; if my mother knew her as I do she would not let her stay in the house:" and yet, though he knew all this, he presently lost the power of opening his lips to make the others know it; for before he had been acquainted with Miss Prudence for a couple of months, the poor young fellow was in love with her.

She had got him in the toils before he had even begun to suspect his danger. Pretty soon indeed he began to be conscious that she was acquiring a certain power over him. He knew that she was flirting with him, but he could not help offering himself to be flirted with: she drew him to her by an attraction that he did not understand, but which he hardly tried to resist: he thought he was studying her, not suspecting that while he was at his clumsy labours she had learnt *him* out and out, and could see through him as through a glass window.

After a very short time had passed, he began to take advantage of every opportunity he could find for being with her, and he was uncomfortably conscious that he seized these opportunities as secretly as he could, and almost conscious (uncomfortably too) that she perfectly understood his method of procedure, and entirely sympathised with it.

"You never talk to me before other people," he said to her once, only half displeased at the demure manner that she always adopted towards him in public, and yet, for conscience' sake, half troubled at it: but, when he made this accusation, she gave a little laugh, and—

"Well—shall we have our next conversation before them all?" she answered instantly. "*I* am quite willing, on my side. Suppose we come to the drawing-room now, and let your mother have the pleasure of hearing you reproach me for my silence—and my other faults."

"You always get the better of me," he replied. "If I ever venture to blame you for anything you always turn the tables on me."

"And what else would you have me do?" she asked. "Do you

think I am fond of being found fault with? —and what are you to me that I should take fault-finding from you?"

And then the colour came to his face, and that last question of hers touched him enough to make his speech fail him. For he had begun by this time (or perhaps had more than begun) to feel a certain secret consciousness that he should like to be something to her: he believed indeed still that there could be nothing serious between them, but he had thought often that he should like to move her to at least a spark of feeling, to awake something different from this mocking and challenging spirit in her. And the young man, who was rapidly growing more in earnest than he yet well knew, was beginning to find that her mocking words had acquired a keen power to sting and wound him.

In addition to these pains, too, that she made him suffer, there was another matter that troubled him not a little. He was afraid of Godfrey. It was true that his brother always spoke of Prudence in a slighting way, which she on her side returned, and that their intercourse, as far as appeared, was a very easy and indifferent one; but Keith had deep experience in his own case that appearances, where Miss Hart was concerned, were by no means to be received with implicit trust, and once or twice at least, if not oftener, it seemed to his eyes (which were perhaps, however, too jealous to see straight) that there was more between them than either of them was disposed to confess.

Once he thought this so strongly, that he even charged her with trying to make his brother care for her; a bold thing to do, and a very unwise one as well, for, as may be supposed, she rose to the occasion, and routed him with humiliation.

"*I* trouble myself about your brother!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up to her utmost height (she was not a tall woman, but many a day she made him feel, for all his six feet, as if she towered far above him). "Do you think I should be likely to try to get a boy like that to care for me, when I would not move hand or foot to entice any man alive?"

And her scorn was so superb that, carried away by it entirely for the moment, he almost humbled himself in the dust before her to entreat her pardon. So, growing always more and more tender over her, and more enthralled by her, Keith came and went during these spring and summer months—not a very happy man, for neither Prudence nor his conscience gave him an easy time of it, but yet loving the chains he had bound himself with too well even to wish to break them.

It was not until August had come that, in plain words, he disclosed the state of his feelings to Miss Hart. Long before that time she had, of course, been perfectly aware of how matters stood with him, for both her natural gifts and her large experiences made any want of comprehension on such a subject quite impossible to her; but it

was only on this August day that the words, which a score of times had been very near the young man's lips, finally crossed them and got spoken.

It was a Sunday, and they had met early in the morning in the garden—as, to tell the truth, by a sort of tacit arrangement, they had done more than once or twice before—he coming out an hour or so before breakfast intentionally to find her, and she demurely permitting herself to be found. On this special day he came in search of her while the heads of most of the rest of the household were still at peace upon their pillows, and discovered her soon in a distant part of the garden, pacing up and down one of the gravel paths, in apparently a very thoughtful mood.

"I hope you have not been here long," he said, cheerfully, when he lighted on her.

"I have been here for some time," she answered coldly.

"Oh, by Jove!—am I late then?" exclaimed the young man in a grieved tone, and he looked at his watch; but as he read it his face brightened again. "No; it is not half-past seven yet. It is you who are too early," he said.

"Too early for what?" she inquired; and then she looked at him with a look that made him ready to sink into his boots, and "If you think I only come out here to enjoy the pleasure of *your* company, Mr. Keith, you are under a curious delusion," she haughtily said.

Upon which he felt so confounded that he held his peace, for (as he had taken it hitherto) he had not had a doubt that it *was* for that reason that Miss Hart, on these Sunday mornings, had been in the habit of shortening her repose.

However, when she rebuked his presumptuous assumption with such severity, he submitted to the rebuke for a few moments in silence, and then merely answered,

"Well, it is for *your* company that *I* come, anyway."

"That is a very different thing," she said.

"I suppose it is," he assented, a little ruefully. "But, I say," he remonstrated, after another little pause, "I think you're awfully hard upon a fellow. If you don't consider that you may give one a little encouragement after all this time—by Jove!——" and then his eloquence failed him.

"I don't see why I need give you any encouragement," she said, deliberately. "I don't see why any man needs encouragement. You are all alike, every one of you. You think a woman ought to be grateful, and to make a curtsey to you for every civil word you speak to her; but I think differently. From me, I beg to tell you, Mr. Keith, you will get neither curtseys nor gratitude."

"Well, I am sure I don't expect them," replied Keith, rather indignantly; and then he walked on with his heart pretty hot within him.

She had a light summer mantle over her shoulders, and she folded

her arms and wrapped it round her, as if it had been a martial cloak. The movement almost seemed as if it were made to show her lover how self-contained and independent of him she was. And so he interpreted it, as he watched her askance, with his heart full of honest love for her, and yet torn with a good many conflicting thoughts.

Did she not care at all for him? the poor lad was asking himself. She was far more than a match for him—he knew that; but yet he remembered words and looks that she had given to him, he remembered (they were rarely enough, indeed, out of his thoughts) two or three tender passages that had passed between them, and he could not believe that her indifference was not assumed. He let a minute pass in silence, and then he spoke to her again.

"I don't know why you come down upon me so this morning," he said. "What have I done? I am sure you ought to be friends with me. If you knew how I felt to you, you would see quickly enough how little *I*, at any rate, deserved to have you say such things."

"And why *you* less than anybody else? You are like other people, I suppose," she answered indifferently.

"But all people are not alike," he remonstrated. "Why, it is absurd to talk like that. Do you think all women are like yourself?"

"If they had my spirit they would be like me in one respect," she said.

"That is, in scorning me and all my sex, I suppose?" he suggested after a moment's silence.

"In holding their proper place, and not letting you or any of your sex trample upon them," she retorted.

Upon which Keith said nothing. The implied suggestion that *he* was trampling upon *her* struck him as something so wildly wide of the truth, that no ejaculation appeared adequate to express his amazement.

They walked again in silence for another minute or so after this. She puzzled him very much: she troubled him and gave him many pangs. But yet he felt unutterably tender to her, and he longed intensely to give some expression to his tenderness. More than once before now he had been very near declaring his love for her, but some lingering sense of prudence, some lingering sense of doubt, had kept him silent. But now the moment had come when it seemed to him that he could not bear to be silent any more.

"Well, I ought almost to be afraid, I suppose, to say anything more to you," he abruptly began, with his heart beating fast, after the pause had lasted for a little while; "and I should be, I fancy, if my conscience were not as clear towards you as it is. But you know pretty well how things are with me, Prudence—I never wanted you or any other woman to knock under to me, but you know I love you

with all my heart, and if you can only like me enough to wait for me till I have got a home to offer you, I—I think I shall be the happiest fellow living," said the poor boy, with rather a break in his voice at the last words.

It was an honest declaration, and no woman need have been ashamed to be touched by it; but Miss Prudence Hart had proved her right to the name she bore on a good many occasions already in her life, and though Keith was trembling as he finished speaking, the healthy colour in her cheeks hardly either deepened or declined, and she paced on steadily for a dozen steps or more after he had ended his speech, thoughtfully, to all appearance, revolving the proposal he had made. She was as cool as a melon, too, when, after that pause, she opened her lips.

"And what would all your people say to you, do you think, supposing I agreed to this arrangement?" she composedly asked, and she turned to him and looked him straight in the face. "As things stand at this moment, they are not—exactly prepared to hear of it, perhaps?"

The poor young man was gifted with only so small and ordinary an amount of self-control that, at this inquiry, he coloured to the roots of his hair.

"They may not be prepared for it, but—but I should tell them at once, of course," he said.

"And they would no doubt be highly gratified by the intelligence?" replied Miss Hart suavely.

And then she looked at him again as she might have looked at a beetle through which she had just stuck a pin, and the next moment gave a curious and, perhaps, not a very pleasant laugh.

He was trying to find some answer to make to her sarcasm, and had uttered two or three words, when she interrupted him, not without a good deal of dignity: she was so entirely mistress of herself that it was quite easy for her to be dignified, whereas even self-possession for him was clearly, for the moment, a thing not to be attained.

"Mr. Keith, I am not quite so simple as not to know how the matter stands," she said. "Before you compromise yourself any further, take back your proposal. You have meant it kindly, perhaps, but you have forgotten, I think, to take into account that I am likely to be a little too proud to accept it. If you want me to thank you, I thank you, and—decline your offer. And now," she said composedly, "let us never speak about this again."

But, of course, he began to speak about it again instantly: he might have hesitated before he opened his lips at all, knowing how much reason there was for hesitation; but, after he had once parted from his discretion, it was not likely that an admonition from her would keep him silent. So he pleaded his cause with all the ardour and the earnestness he could call to his aid, and she walked placidly

by his side and listened to him, finding the occupation, perhaps, not unpleasant.

"If it is only that you mind what the rest may say, you ought not to give me up for that," the young man eagerly argued. "And you are not going to tell me, Prudence, that you don't care at all for me? You have as good as said you liked me before now. I don't think that you would have let things go as far as they have—that you would have let me get so fond of you as you know I have been getting—if you had not meant to give something back to me at last."

"You forget, Mr. Keith, that people are sometimes a little weak," replied Miss Hart to this appeal; and then, at last, she cast her eyes modestly to the ground. "*I* was *very* weak if I ever said I liked you."

"But unless it had been true you would not have said it at all!" exclaimed Keith triumphantly; "and the truth of it is all I want you to allow. If you let me know that you like me, you can't imagine," cried the young man, "that I am going to give you up. Prudence, *do* you like me?" And with the last words, which came from his lips with a tremulous tenderness, he ventured to touch her hand, and after a moment, even to take it in his own.

She submitted to this movement for a few seconds, but after that space of time she gave a little, just audible sigh, and drew herself away from him.

"This is very foolish," she said abruptly.

"Foolish, do you call it!" ejaculated Keith, with all his face on fire. "It seems to me like—like standing on the threshold of some new world."

"Well, and may not the threshold of a new world be a very risky place to stand on?" inquired Miss Hart. "I am a coward, you see, Mr. Keith, and I am afraid of the unknown. Come, I repeat it is all foolish. Let us forget this last half hour."

"How can you tell me to do that, as if you believed that it was possible?" the young man broke out, passionately.

"You have been very unwise," said Miss Hart, reprovingly.

"I have to learn that yet," he replied. "Surely, Prudence, I have told you nothing this morning that you did not know before! You allow that, do you not? And, dear," he went on, ardently, after a moment's silence, "if you have known that indeed, and if you have still gone on meeting me, how can I believe that all this time you have meant to say No to me at last? You cannot have meant it; there is so much between No and Yes. Give me one word of hope, and I will wait—you do not know how patiently I will wait—for the rest."

And then she made no immediate answer to him; but, after a little pause, she finally did give him one word of hope.

It was a very cool and cautious word, but, such as it was, it raised

him to the seventh heaven. But, as time went on, I am afraid the poor lad found that he had entered into rather a stormy paradise, and that if Miss Hart had disturbed his repose in the days before he declared himself to be her lover, she racked him with almost unbearable torments in these other days that came after them. For he soon discovered that his expectation of receiving any extended favours from her hands after his elevation was a delusion of the most absolute kind. She gave him not more than she had given him before, but less. She treated him with brusquerie, with coldness, sometimes even with contempt: she made him jealous by parading her apparent preference of other people to himself; and when he reproached her with these cruelties she told him coolly that she practised them for his own good, that he might learn prudence, and wean his affections from her.

"For you know you are very foolish to care about me," she often told him, demurely. "There are a great many other girls that it would be far better for you to like." And she would enumerate these maidens sometimes, till she drove him wild with impatience.

"I will marry you, or no other woman in this world!" he told her one day, with vehemence. And then she laughed, and suddenly stopped her teasing talk, and, looking in his face with a softer look in her eyes than she often let him see:

"Well, I don't think you will ever marry me," she said, abruptly; "but, if such an unlikely thing should by chance happen, I will try not to make you unhappy—you good old Keith."

And on this—for she gave him few such tender speeches—the foolish fellow was so moved that, feeling an entire inability to express his gratitude in words, he fairly went down on his knees before her, and kissed the little hands she gave up to him, with all kinds of incoherent blessings stumbling over one another on his lips.

And so, with little visible change, things went on till the summer had passed its height. Long before this, Prudence had made herself much at home in the Verner family, and had won a high opinion for her virtues from Mr. and Mrs. Verner alike. From Mabel she had, perhaps, not quite won so high an opinion, for Mabel's acquaintance with her being more intimate, led now and then to certain suspicions that made that young lady doubtful about the innermost character of her new friend: yet even Mabel was attracted by her too much to be disposed readily to think ill of her. "It seems to me that she is not quite straightforward," she had said, hesitatingly, once or twice to Keith (who, having his own thoughts, too, on that point, had not, perhaps, been able to do much to allay his sister's perplexity); but to her mother she had not said even so much as this. She was a kind-hearted girl, and hardly liked to hint at suspicions that she could not prove; "for if mamma thought there was anything odd about her she would never let her stay," she argued, "and it would seem so hard to send her away. Besides, I may be wrong,

and she is so nice in many ways, and I don't believe she means any harm. It is only that—I think—she does not tell the truth," she would say, a little troubled, and yet unable to resolve that, if other people's eyes were shut, it was her business to open them. So she kept silent; and Prudence went on her way rejoicing.

But on a certain morning, when autumn had begun, and the beech trees were growing red and dropping their leaves upon the lawn, the postman brought a letter to Miss Hart, from which unexpected results ensued. It was a letter addressed in a man's hand, and when she received it at the breakfast-table, Prudence blushed a little, and slipped it into her apron pocket unopened, and when the meal was ended took her departure from the apartment rather hastily: after which for a good while nobody saw her any more.

After an hour or two had passed, however, Mrs. Verner was seated by herself in the dining-room with her desk and her account books before her, when Miss Hart's gentle fingers opened the door, and her soft step having brought her to Mrs. Verner's side, down she unexpectedly plumped there on the floor, giving the elder lady, who was busy with her bills, rather a turn.

"What's the matter, my dear?" she said quickly, looking round.

"Oh, dearest Mrs. Verner, nothing is the matter," answered Prudence, sweetly. She had a pretty colour in her cheeks, and in her eyes the softest look of modest confusion. "Nothing is the matter—unless you should be angry; but you won't be that, I think, because I am so happy. I have come to tell you first of all. Dear Mrs. Verner, I am—I am going to be married."

"Married, Prudence!" cried Mrs. Verner, quite taken aback, for she had thought she knew all the girl's concerns, and had calmly come to the conclusion long ago that she had never had a lover in her life.

"Yes. I knew I should surprise you," answered Prudence, softly laughing, "for I never told you, did I? But it has been such a long attachment—oh, such a long attachment! and—and there were difficulties; but he can do what he likes now, and my only trouble, dear Mrs. Verner, is that I must leave you all at once. Yes, at once, for he is going with his regiment to Canada almost immediately, and—and there will be so many things to do, you know."

"But, Prudence, where do you propose to go to?" exclaimed the matron, feeling almost scandalized at the rapidity with which Miss Hart was preparing to transact the whole affair. "You can't be married in a moment, my dear child."

"Oh, no; but he asks me to go and stay in London with his brother," explained Prudence, with another sweet and modest smile. "His brother is married. I don't know his wife, but that doesn't matter, does it? And they have sent an invitation to me to go to them, and they want to have our wedding from their house. Are they not kind? But I think everybody is kind. Wherever I go people are so good to me," said grateful Prudence.

The news was startling; but of course the only thing to do was to facilitate Miss Hart's departure. The gentleman who was to be her husband had just come into a very good fortune, she informed them. "I am sure you will be glad to know that I shall not be poor," she told them meekly; and they were very glad, of course. They rejoiced in her happiness altogether very heartily. "The only thing we have to regret is that we must lose you," they said to her.

"But you will not lose me for ever, I hope," Prudence answered very sweetly to this. "My George hopes only to be abroad for a very few years, and then we shall settle in England, and I hope I shall see a *great* deal of you."

It had been on a Tuesday morning that she had received her letter, and so soon as Thursday she took her leave of them.

"Why, you won't see the boys again!" Mrs. Verner said once to her with a sudden thought: "unless, indeed, they could call on you in London to say good-bye?"

But Miss Hart did not receive this proposition very warmly.

"Perhaps, as I do not know Mrs. Gardener yet, it might look like taking rather a liberty to ask visitors to her house—don't you think so?" she asked anxiously. "And they would hardly care to come either, I daresay. Oh no, I think you had better say good-bye to them for me. Please say good-bye, with my *very* kind remembrances."

And so when Thursday came she took her departure with smiles and tears. It was quite an affecting parting. Mr. and Mrs. Verner almost felt as if they were separating from a daughter. They gave her a handsome present to help her with her trousseau; they told her to let them have frequent news of her. "The boys will be so surprised," Mrs. Verner repeated, an hour before the end came. "I shall write to Keith this afternoon and tell him. They will both be so sorry when they hear you are gone."

And accordingly, when Prudence was fairly launched on her new life, Mrs. Verner wrote her note, and Keith got it the next morning. He found it on his table when he came in to breakfast, and he read it in Godfrey's presence, and as he read it he gave a gasp and turned deadly pale.

"I say, what's up?" cried his brother in surprise; and then without a word Keith dashed the letter on the ground, and the other picked it up and read it.

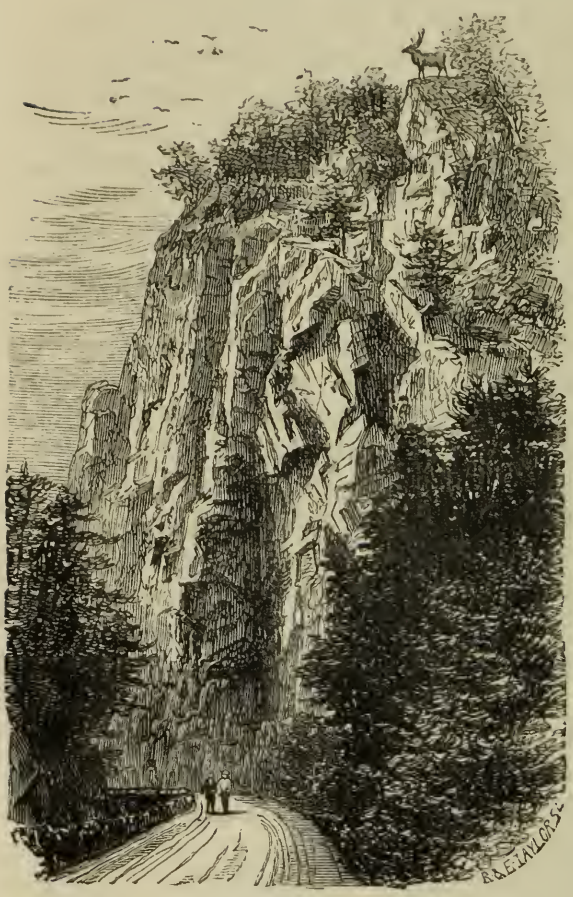
The next moment Godfrey had struck his clenched hand on the table with a blow that made the cups and saucers ring.

"Confound her!" he cried furiously.

But Keith only looked at him for a moment, and then walked blindly out of the room. His brother might curse her, but he had loved her too well for that. He felt as if his life was ended. Through the closed doors he heard Godfrey swearing, and he sat down alone, like a man who was stunned.

# IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.



Hirschsprung.

How melancholy but how true it is that, in travelling, our pleasures or pains for the most part wait upon the elements. And though one of the subtle charms of a sunny summer's day may lie in the very feeling that it cannot last for ever, and may change with the hour, when the inevitable change comes it is the more intolerable from the very contrast that went before. We mourn our lost sunshine; grow depressed, restless, and impatient; gaze upwards again and again for the smallest vision of blue sky, that, like a watched-for visitor, seems never to come; and for the time being feel our happiness insolvent.

So was it on entering the good old town of Freiburg. The previous day had been exquisite beyond comparison; a day that only now and then comes to us; standing out in a life-time as beautiful above other days; seeming to breathe an atmosphere of heaven rather than of earth; full of an ethereal beauty which makes us feel as if, even without wings, we had the power of soaring into all that blue, vaulted distance. The glories of the day had culminated in a gorgeous sunset. The sky was studded with fleecy clouds that floated in mid-air like tinted jewels; the very atmosphere seemed to flash colours around; the hills were thrown out in deep lights and shades; the pine forests were gilded and touched into glowing life by the declining sun; a glow for a moment deepening to crimson as he sank to the horizon. The ruin crowning the height opposite St. Margaretha, and just above the railway station, stood out

sharply and romantically amidst all the effects of sunset and twilight. And the town itself, surrounded, guarded, by these wooded heights, seemed wonderfully favoured. Full of repose; abounding in lives that, in the midst of all these beauties of creation, ought to be good and blest above the common lot of mankind.

But the next morning all had changed, simply because the clouds during the night had gathered and the rain was coming down like a second deluge. The few steps from the station to the Zähringer Hof in Freiburg were yet enough to drench one through and through, and make one feel that when it rains in the Black Forest it rains in earnest. It was taking the old town at a disadvantage.

Happily the very sharpness of the rain—like all violent outbursts, whether in nature or mankind—was a promise of short duration. In effect, by the afternoon the waterspouts had ceased to empty themselves upon the earth. But the clouds remained; mists hung about the hills; a respite was granted, and that was all.

Near the hotel were houses, large, white and cool, with lovely gardens in which grew graceful acacias, many-coloured flowers and trailing creepers, vines and the delicate convolvulus. Opposite, in the busy life of the station, trains with their living freight were keeping up a constant rush and roar; not very romantic, but very necessary to the demands of the nineteenth century. Upwards, to the left, you presently came to the principal street, adorned with two quaint Gothic fountains, the one with an odour of sanctity about it in the form of statues of bishops, knights, and saints of the church; the other bearing the image of Berthold, Duke of Zähringen, who founded Freiburg about the end of the eleventh century. And above the sloping, gabled roofs of the houses, like a vision of fairy architecture, rose the exquisite fretted spire of the cathedral.

Before the eleventh century Freiburg was a small village inhabited by miners. Since that time, like almost all these old continental towns, it has gone through many vicissitudes. Wars, the love of conquest, the rise and fall of empires, inevitably leave their mark upon the world. We would forgive this, if only they left us more traces of the past in these ancient towns. More of antiquity; monuments of a strong and powerful age inhabited by a race of men earnest in all they did; in their very wars and works, their failings and vices, as much as in their virtues.

A great deal of Freiburg is modern and uninteresting from the antiquarian's point of view. But there are a few quaint bits about it that stand out in contrast with the new. Houses that here and there remind one of the old-world streets of Holland, and seem to have been asleep for two or three centuries, the while a new world was springing up around them. The gateways are ancient and curious, and certainly add much to the picturesque impression of the town; especially the St. Martin's Thor with its half-obliterated fresco, repreting the legend of the saint sharing his cloak with a mendicant.

But the glory and ornament of Freiburg is its cathedral: with the exception of Cologne, said to be the only large Gothic church in Germany in a state of completion. Without being of great size, it is of exquisite proportions, full of beauty, of delicate symmetry in its pointed arches and noble pillars. Many of the windows are of wonderful old stained glass that throw a dim religious light over the interior. The sun streaming in through the ancient windows, chequers the pavement with many colours, bathing pillars and arches in lights and shadows, raising them to a beauty that might grace a fairer land than that of earth. Look which way you will, all is harmony so just that the building gives one the impression of being larger than it is in reality. The pulpit is a wonderful bit of stone work, and there are good pictures and good carving in the chapels behind the choir.

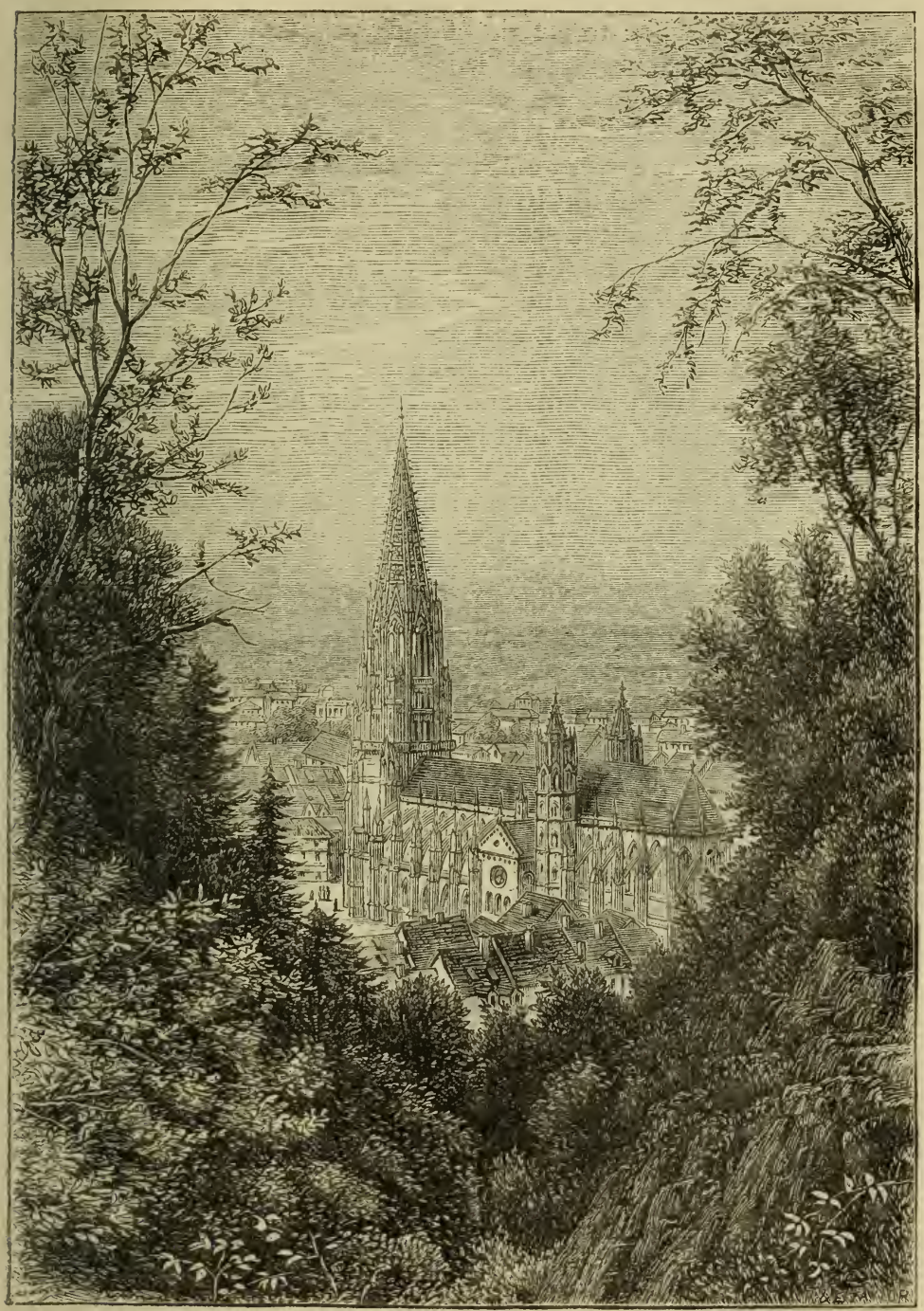
When I first saw these chapels, service, or rather the confessional, was in progress. Devotees were kneeling before pictures and painted images, quietly waiting their turn to enter the confessional box. In the open centre compartment, without door or shutter, was seated a priest with a large cloth or towel held to his face, and in either wing a woman crouched in the corner, one confessing, the other biding her time. It was only possible to take a quiet, quick look at all; one's presence amidst these devotees seemed an intrusion. The chapels were not open to the public, and the old "Suisse," guarding the entrance like a dragon, had passed me in on conditions which made moments of consequence. Even in those moments I ran the gauntlet of many a pair of bright eyes, perchance disturbed many a train of introspective thought; for the fair dévotes guessed too surely that the intruder was not there for purposes of unburdening a conscience, however great might be its load.

But the most conspicuous and most perfect portion of the cathedral is its tower and spire of open work, of exquisite finish, delicate as lace, a dream of architectural beauty. This spire, 365 feet high, crowns the building, and may be seen for miles around, far and near; alike from plains watered by the Dreisam and the Rhine, and from wooded heights that slope upwards and outwards, chain beyond chain, in many directions, stretching far into cloudland.

From the summit of the tower the view is beautiful and varied. Twelve miles away, the Rhine glows through wide plains; nearer, the waters of the Dreisam run through the town; far off are the blue Vosges mountains, misty and dark and purple, but ever graceful and dreamy. Again, in the opposite direction, beyond those wide plains, bounded by low wooded hills, commences the wild Höllenthal, one of the most picturesque and interesting valleys in the Black Forest.

Immediately beneath one's feet lies the town, surrounding the cathedral, as if to guard this treasure from the approach of enemies. The plan of the town may easily be traced; its public buildings

noted; its church towers and steeples rising here and there in humble imitation of the glorious structure on which we stand. The river



FREIBURG.

wends its quiet way onwards, like a large silver thread, calm, silent, and placid, type of many a life full of noble thoughts and quiet deeds.

The town is full of animation. Immediately below is the market place, with its wonderful old Kaufhaus. The market is full of buyers and sellers; women with large white kerchiefs over their heads, doing their best to get rid of their wares, and so return home with a comfortable feeling of being wise and thrifty housewives. People are flitting to and fro, silent as ghosts, since they are too far off to be heard. But the rattle of wheels charges like distant thunder through the streets, and if ghosts have vehicles, these cannot be theirs. Further off, the barracks with its soldiers moving about, form a cheerful spot in the scene.

The life and energy of the town make the silence and repose of the great stretches of hill and valley beyond it all the more forcible by contrast. How strange it all seems, this disposition of the world in which we live. On the one hand a few small towns, relatively speaking, where men swarm and herd and hustle each other, go through all kinds of work and toil, rise up early and late take rest, and eat the bread of sorrows in their struggle after fame and fortune, or, it may be, only their daily wage: and on the other hand immense stretches of country—the greater portion of this beautiful earth, given up to the silence and solitude that has reigned there since the creation.

But not alone from the cathedral tower are wide and beautiful views apparent. Out by the Schwaben Thor, and ascending the Schlossberg amidst sloping vineyards, you presently reach the ruin-crowned height, and are rewarded by a yet lovelier view than that just described. For now the whole town lies spread before you, framed by surrounding hills; and above the houses stands out the beautiful cathedral, throwing its refined and solemn influence over all. Through the open spire you may see the sky beyond, and the work looks so delicate and fragile it is difficult to realise that it has stood there for centuries.

From this height the beauty of the situation of Freiburg was apparent; a gem in a very lovely setting; though, on this particular afternoon, overshadowed by gloomy clouds, and unrelieved by the lights and shades and laughing sunshine, which are to scenery what life is to the human frame.

The Kaufhaus, or Merchants' Hall, just alluded to, in the market place, is perhaps the most curious building in Freiburg, and apparently one of the most ancient, dating back to the fifteenth century. It is of Gothic architecture, with a round, arched portico supported by five pillars, a small turret on either side jutting out beyond the rest of the structure. Curious frescoes adorn the front, and statues of the Emperors of Germany, whilst coloured tiles decorate the slanting roof with its gabled ends.

Sunday morning I went to hear high mass at the cathedral, when, it was said, grand music would be heard. Of course different people have different estimates of what is music and what is grand.

Certainly it was the very place for the enjoyment of good music; but though the orchestra was not bad and the singing was passable, it fell far short of its reputation. When half over, and the hour for the English church service had arrived, it was a relief to creep quietly away to a very different atmosphere and a simple ritual.

One of the most interesting visits is that to the convict prison, just outside Freiburg. Here again (strange fate) I was met with the answer that the governor was away at a marriage in the town—just as though marriages were for ever taking place in the Black Forest. However, more fortunate than at Villingen (not having a woman's will to deal with), after a few preliminary ceremonies, the great prison doors swung back and admitted me.

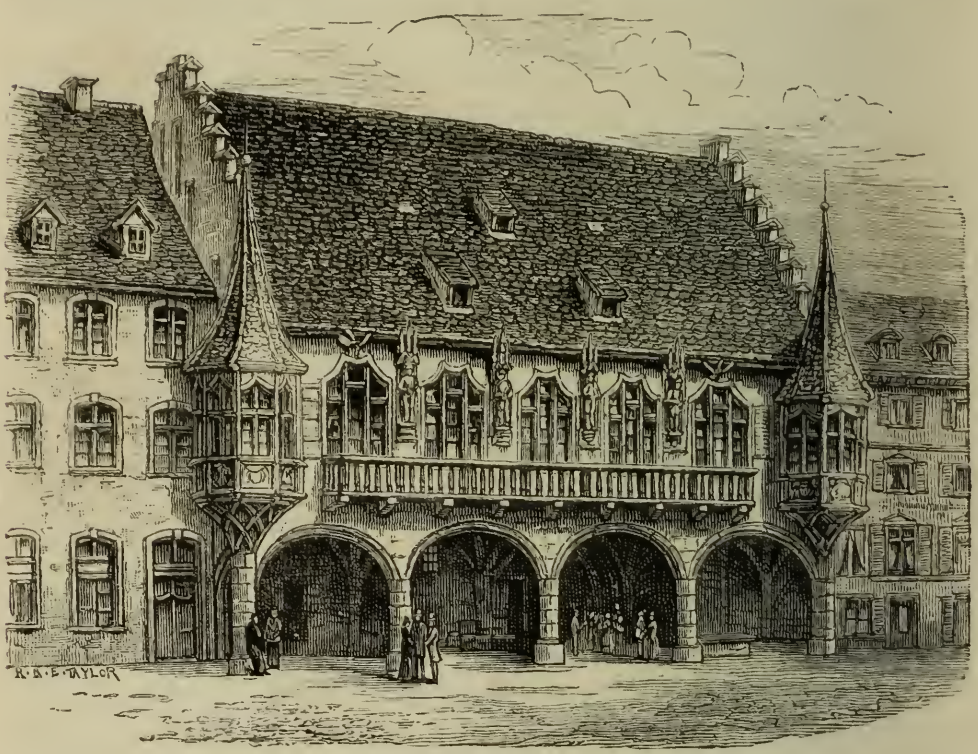
The prisoners here are all reduced to solitary confinement, be the term long or short. Nothing could be better organised or regulated. The long passages were as clean, the iron rails as bright as though built but yesterday. No sound re-echoed through the great building, of which one wing remains to be added. I was admitted into several of the cells, but as a rule visitors are not allowed to enter them or to speak to the prisoners. Solitary confinement, with a silence as profound as that reigning within monastic walls, is the stern rule; the latter, to some of them, probably a greater punishment than the loss of liberty. But, without entering many cells, the warder slipped aside the little wooden slide in the door, about two inches square, through which I was able to see into most of them.

The prisoners were all at work, some at one trade, some at another. Many of the faces convinced me that they were in excellent keeping, and could not do better than remain there for the rest of their days. No power on earth would keep such faces and such expressions out of mischief. Others again must evidently have got into prison through the force of untoward circumstances; a cruel fate more strong than they; faces never born, never meant to stand in a felon's dock, or to yield to the temptation of crime. Here the general expression was one of intense melancholy and dejection. One longed to enter, to bid them be of good courage, hope for better days, and a chance of redeeming what had been wrong in the past. But this was not permitted. Only if there is anything in mesmeric influence, in that sympathy which silently and unconsciously asserts its presence, surely a glimmer of hope must have darted through the souls of some of those poor wretches, making their present life more bearable, their future less dark. Who can tell the remorse and regret, the misery and despair of the "might have been," which must eat into the very souls of the few out of the thousands, who, in a moment of sudden weakness or dire temptation, have fallen from their "high estate" as honest men?

The chapel was fitted up in a series of small boxes, so that no one prisoner could see another. Sunday morning is the only time they are allowed to break silence and talk to the minister, as he catechises,

questions, and does his best to convert them from the error of their ways. Sunday morning, consequently, is, to some of them, probably the happiest time of the week.

The bakers were at work in the bakery, making the day's consumption of bread—or more probably the morrow's. Great ovens, seven times heated, immense baskets full of dark brown loaves that sent forth a steaming, savoury odour, that might have adorned a king's table. The men, with nothing on but loose trowsers, looked as jolly and happy as sandboys, and had it been mid-winter, instead of mid-summer, one might have envied them their berth.



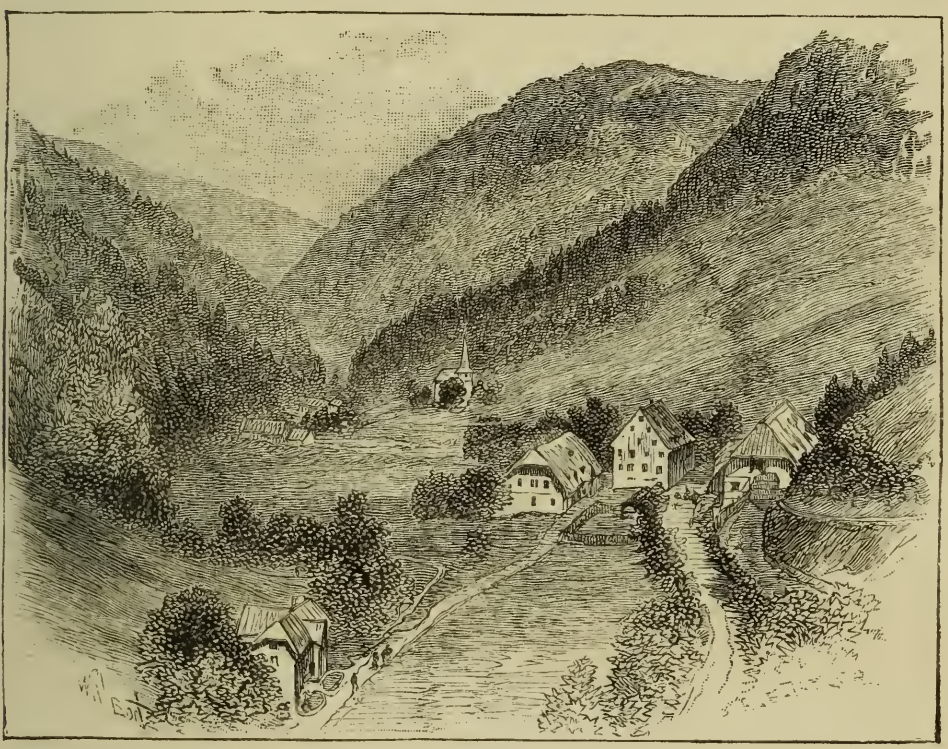
KAUFHAUS.

I was sorry to leave the quiet prison, where calm reigned so conspicuously; where the long, silent corridors, white, clean and bright, were positively cheerful, in spite of the sad histories they enclosed. And, back in Freiburg, I came upon a wedding at the cathedral—probably the very marriage at which the governor was "assisting." Smart carriages, to which there seemed no end, were dashing away from the doors, full of people dressed in dazzling raiment.

It was one of my last impressions of Freiburg. That afternoon I left it, and once more entered the Black Forest by the Höllenthal, or Valley of Hell. Out through the quaint streets and the Schwaben Thor, crossing a bridge that spanned the river, the town was soon numbered among the things of the past. The river frothed over its rocky bed; a few picturesque, straggling houses lined the banks; a large, and somewhat uninteresting, plain stretched on either hand,

bounded by low, undulating, wooded hills. All this narrowed and disappeared at the entrance to the Höllenthal, by many considered, it has already been remarked, one of the finest valleys in the Schwarzwald.

The beginning of the valley is called Himmelreich, or "Kingdom of Heaven," chiefly, I believe, from the height of the mountains, their fertility and beauty, and an absence of the wild grandeur which distinguishes the valley as you get further into it. Then the mountains contracted and closed in. Bare, frowning, perpendicular rocks obstructed our progress. Again, wooded heights succeeded the rocks,



HÖLLENTHAL.

and the valley was clothed with trees that whispered, and ferns and wild flowers that lined the river banks.

But the really most sublime part was on reaching the Höllen-pass, where the mountains closed in so nearly that they overshadowed the road and steeped it in a gloom at once grand and impressive. To this no doubt the valley owes its name, awful of sound in its English translation, ordinary and matter-of-course enough in the original. For about half an hour we were travelling through a wild, magnificent ravine, to which was added the rushing of the little River Hölle. Every now and then we almost lost view of the sky, and under cover of overhanging rocks, might have been entering portals leading to unknown depths. All this terminated in a point, where the rocks, overgrown with pines and underwood on the one side, bare and precipitous on the other, rose to a considerable

height, called the Hirschsprung, on the summit of which is the carved figure of a stag, as if about to leap across the chasm.

The valley now opened out, and the scenery lost its wild and gloomy aspect. Wooded slopes succeeded the frowning rocks, and the road winding about the mountains disclosed at every step fresh beauties. Wayside houses, lone and desolate; an inn where the landlord on the steps looked as if he thought we were acting unfairly by him in not putting up under the shadow of the sign, Zum Adler. Yet further, a white chapel in the valley, with a dark spire that stood out in bold relief against the hilly background; a few houses, surrounding the church, constituting the village of Höllsteig. Finally, a few saw-mills by the river-side, leading to the large white inn, Sternen.

Here I was to find quarters for the night, and the carriage that had brought me so far on my road would return to Freiburg. Nor should I be sorry to see the last of it. Though supplied by the Hotel Zähringer, it was the worst vehicle, and, above all, the worst driver that fell to my lot throughout the Black Forest.

The situation of the inn was strangely beautiful, though nothing could well exceed its loneliness. It stood in the midst of a lovely paradise. Few spots in the whole Forest are more favoured. Wooded and fertile hills rose on all sides. People come here and remain for weeks together; and to all who want a period of rest and quiet retreat from the world it may safely be recommended. Dull and gloomy, somewhat sad and depressing, it undoubtedly is, but there are times when even these influences are acceptable. And there are people so cheerfully disposed that they would be happy if cast adrift on a desert island.

Near the inn was the entrance to the Ravennathal, a wild valley and ravine leading to a small picturesque lake. Close by, the river, running its noisy course, turned the old wheels of the saw-mills down below, setting in motion the ponderous machinery. Opposite the inn was a small church capable of holding just six people; a curious little erection that might have been a votive chapel in the days when pilgrimages were in vogue in the Black Forest. And what lovelier spot than this to call forth all the sublime and religious emotions supposed to accompany a pilgrimage?

The inn was almost deserted. The season was over, and all had departed, except a small group consisting of a mother, governess, maid, and two troublesome children. The large rooms looked empty and ghostlike; the outside gloom penetrated into the house. As twilight deepened into night, the great mountains with their dark pines, where the night winds whispered and murmured, seemed endless in extent, emblematical of despair, and solitude, and death; blackness and silence everywhere, stretching, for all one could see, to the ends of the earth. No sound in earth or air but the murmur of the river as it ran through the valley.

In the gathering night up flashed the diligence from Freiburg, the advancing lights glowing like the eyes of a fiery monster. A few moments' pause and away it went again, the bells on the horses—few of the horses about here have bells—jingling mysteriously, almost musically, long after it had passed out of sight. As I listened to them, mine host discoursed sweet music of his own in praises of his house and its surroundings—praises, no doubt, well merited. Through the summer, he said, he was generally full of people, who spent, many of them, weeks at Höllsteig enjoying the baths, excursions, and mountain air.

Then before finally turning in, I explored the large stables, where four splendid white horses were being groomed and harnessed by a post-boy, flitting about like a will-o'-the-wisp. The light from his lantern threw a weird gleam over his features, reminding one of Schalken's pictures. The diligence for which he was preparing would on this occasion start at midnight. The buildings were all wrapped in gloom and silence as profound as that which reigned upon the hills and in the depths of the dark forests. The glimmer from the stable window was the one solitary token of life and habitation in all the blackness. The day had been hot and sultry, but up here in the mountains it was well-nigh cold and cheerless as winter.

When night and gloom had fled away and given place to sunshine and blue skies, I said good-bye to Höllsteig, and was once more on the road. Its finest point was at the Cross Rock, where the river rushed over its shallow bed at the bottom of a deep wild ravine, whilst the mountains rose above, gloomy and frowning in spite of the sunshine and the warm, soft air. The landscape widened; opposite hills sloped upwards in long, gradual stretches, some green and cultivated, others dark with pine woods; villages, looking calm and happy, basked in the sunlight. Presently the cool surface of the Titisee, one of the Black Forest lakes, came into view. In a few moments we had pulled up at the inn, for the sake of a rest and a short row upon the water.

It was a small lake, long and narrow, surrounded by hills; sombre firs interspersing broad patches of bright green. To the right a stony barren height stood out in strange contrast with its fertile surroundings. Houses were dotted about, and the blue peat smoke curled upwards in picturesque contrast with the dark background. Trees fringing the borders of the water threw upon it their shadows. It was certainly one of the prettiest lakes in the Black Forest. Not the gloom and sombre depth, the intense solitude and romantic reputation of the Mummelsee; not, like that lake, found after much toiling up a mountain side, reposing out of the world and above the world. But the Titisee is surrounded by charming country, and after a long succession of hills and plains, valleys and ravines, this calm little sheet of water is a grateful break in the monotony of a day's journey.

A boy paddled me about in a punt; for there was something peculiar

in the current of the water or the construction of the boat, and it was not worth while wasting the precious moments at one's disposal in endeavouring to discover why it *would* go round and round in any hands but those of the little fellow who had learned the secret of its navigation. This lake, too, has the reputation of being charmed. Those who dive into it are said to hear all sounds upon the road, far and near, reproduced in the romantic form of bells.

A fellow pilgrim, who had been spending several days at the inn, said he had been excessively comfortable, and should be sorry when, on the morrow, his time for leaving arrived. He was now waiting for the diligence which would pass presently; intending to go with it as far as Schluchsee or St. Blasien, and walk back, provided he could

STERN INN, HÖLLSTEIG.

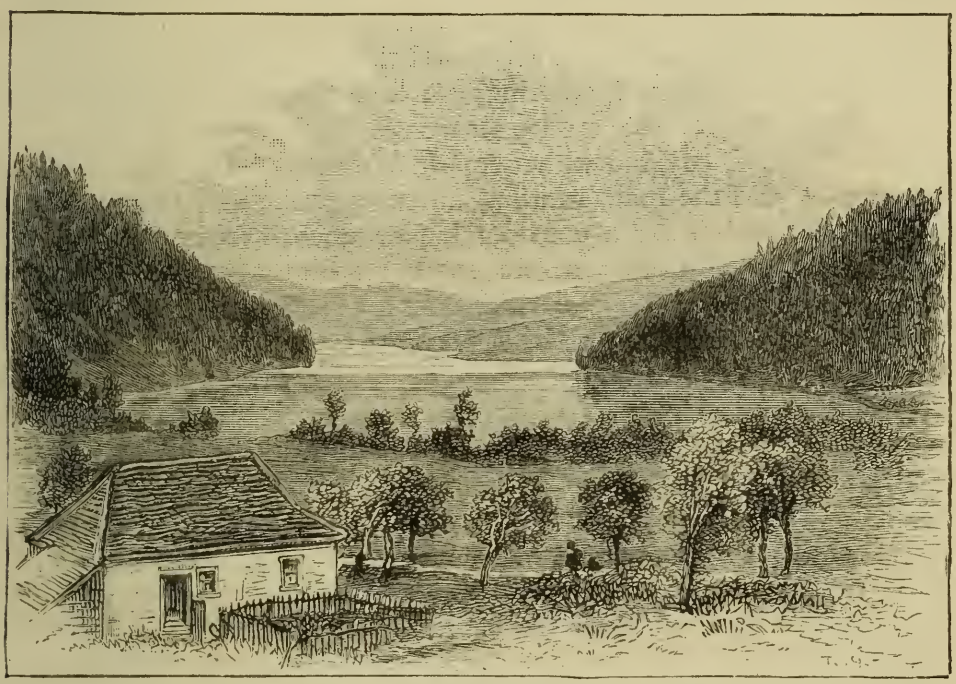
get an outside place. A matter so uncertain that he gladly accepted a seat which made him independent of the doubtful omnibus.

It was easy to understand anyone's reluctance to leave the Titisee. I was sorry to do so after less than an hour's acquaintance with it. There was a quietness and repose about the place pleasant and refreshing. A few days at the little inn might be very profitably spent, exploring the neighbourhood, paddling about the lake, which is, moreover, well stocked with fish, and enjoying the country walks and short, mountain excursions that abound.

The driver whipped up his horses and away we went, a small crowd upon the steps of the inn looking after us until we were out of sight. There is so little variety in the "daily round" of these remote, wayside houses, that the smallest incident seems a distraction. It was more than a pleasant drive, yet had no specially remarkable features to leave strong impressions behind it. About one o'clock we reached

the inn near the Schluchsee—a lake much larger than the Titisee, but scarcely as picturesque or interesting.

It was a goodly sized inn, with a "dependence," like so many of these inns, in the shape of a second building, and many people seemed staying there. Table d'hôte was just beginning, and one long table was nearly filled, English and French amongst the number. Here, more than at the Titisee or Höllsteig, people seem to make long sojourns. No doubt it is a pleasant change from the outside world. You are far enough away from any town to make a feeling of rest and repose inevitable. The surrounding country is very lovely,



SCHLUCHSEE.

and there are the attractions of the lake, which, like the Titisee, is well stocked with fish. The walks and excursions in the neighbourhood are sufficient to give fresh variety and interest to each day. The village is small and quiet, and, as the country people would say, not of much account; and its church is not by any means an eighth wonder of the world.

Presently we strolled down hill to the lake, intending to disport thereon. But the boat-keeper was away, and had maliciously locked up the oars, and it was far too great a struggle and loss of time to go back to the inn for redress. So we quietly sauntered by the side of the lake, under the shadow of the pine trees that grew down to the water's edge; admired its beauty, though, after all, it was not so very striking, at least from this particular point of view. Admired, too, the coolness and contrivance of a tourist, evidently walking through the country, who had laid his knapsack upon the ground, and having

slung a net between two trees, was lying at ease therein, reading some favourite volume, and luxuriating in the shade of the firs, which kept out so well the heat and glare of the afternoon sun.

Back to the inn at length, where a fresh carriage had to be taken for St. Blasien. But we were not far on the road when my "compagnon de voyage" for the time being, finding the way longer than he had anticipated, or rather that the day had flown more quickly (you cannot waste time at tables d'hôte, and saunter about pleasant lakes, however delightful it all may be, without finding that the shadows will begin to lengthen before you are prepared for them), decided to turn back in order to reach the Titisee before nightfall—a feat he certainly never accomplished. Thus I was left to continue my way with no other society at command than that of the civil driver.

From this point, on entering the Schwarzhalde, a romantic and beautiful valley, the scenery became once more especially grand and striking. Hills, covered with deep dark pines, stretched upwards on either side, and the road, winding amongst them, and overshadowed by them, extended for a considerable distance. At length, between two ranges of hills, right before us, but so far off as to look like a dream, there was suddenly disclosed the loveliest view of the Alps ever seen. It appeared less a vision of earth than of heaven opened to mortal eyes; snow mountains so distant, so lofty, as to be in the very heaven itself; a part of the pure ethereal blue in which they seemed to repose. The declining sun flushed them with a celestial rosy red. With it all, softened by distance, and enveloped by a very slight haze that increased their beauty by half veiling it, one could only think of them as dream mountains.

The fleeting character of the vision, and its suddenness—I had not been thinking of the Alps, and was not aware that they would appear from any point of the road—perhaps added no little to its charm, and to the after remembrance. It was an unusually fortunate vision too. The Alps had been seen only twice in six weeks, and were now seen at the right and exact moment. Ten minutes earlier they would not have been bathed in that rosy light which has no comparison, and cannot really be described; the flush of declining sunlight, which comes so suddenly, departs as soon: and ten minutes later—for we stopped and saw the vision to the end—all had disappeared. It was as if the gates of heaven had rolled back and closed-in the glory, leaving us outside to darkness and melancholy.

Soon after this we commenced a steep descent, still with the pine woods all about us. The road wound round in a deep valley, where, at the bottom, a noisy river ran its course: down, down until we reached the level. Then the great dome of the church of St. Blasien reared its ponderous head, as if it wanted to rival the hills in size; the village opened up; we passed through an archway leading to the Hôtel St. Blasien; and the day's journey was at an end.

No spot in the Black Forest strikes the traveller with greater sur-

prise than St. Blasien. Here, buried from the world, surrounded by high mountains pine-clad to their summit, of the utmost depth and gloom, stands what was once an enormous Benedictine Monastery. It is a wonderful building, apparently of endless extent; with long, dreary passages and great, old-fashioned, strangely handsome and wonderfully carved staircases. In the building itself, where once the monks were wont to do prayers and penance, and go through the daily routine of monastic life, is now heard the sound of machinery. On entering you are astonished at the endless rows of spinning jennies, the army of men and women full of business and activity; and you almost fancy that instead of being in the Black Forest you have suddenly been transported into the very heart of Manchester.

Nothing can be more at variance with the old monastic building, with the sombre, majestic hills enshrouding the place, than the sound, rush, and look of all this rattling, roaring ironwork. Almost it seems to desecrate a spot round which, in spite of time, chance, and change, there still lingers an atmosphere of the religious life so long contained within its walls. The very windows, almost countless in number, with their iron bars, bear silent witness to the dead past—and past for ever.

Most unusual sight of all, is the great dome rising like a small St. Paul's, in strange, incongruous contrast with the hills, covering an immense rotunda that was once the church, built in 1786 after the model of the Pantheon; to-day, in the hands of workmen, undergoing a state of transformation. Walking through all the dirt and débris to the great doors beyond, I found myself in a handsome Grecian building that is now the church. Great pillars supporting galleries, and a remarkable altar piece, a tryptich, of the Ascension, St. Blasius on one side, St. Fridolin on the other.

St. Blasien is much frequented in summer by Germans, and has the reputation of being especially healthy. There are numerous excursions to be made in the neighbourhood, and excellent fishing in the Alb. Wherever a monastery has existed depend upon it good fishing is not far off. But the hotel was not comfortable. The manager was civil and obliging enough, but it is worth while recording that his clerk was amongst the most disagreeable of men in the whole Duchy of Baden.

For my own part, buried here so deep down in the mountains, I could not fancy St. Blasien an especially pleasant or healthy place for a long sojourn. Far more so was the village of Höchenschwand, an hour's walk and more from hence, a long continuous ascent. It is one of the highest villages in the Forest, nearly 3,500 feet above the sea level, and is perched on the very summit of the mountain.

I performed the pilgrimage one evening in the hope of seeing the sunset and the view, and failed in both. There is a large, comfortable hotel at Höchenschwand, better looking in every respect than the inn at St. Blasien. Here, too, you can breathe; you are not

oppressed by sun and mountains; the air is light, pure, and invigorating; the views are glorious. On the one side all the wooded heights around St. Blasien, so gloomy, so dark, so grand and beautiful; on the other, vast plains, looking over into Switzerland and Italy; distant mountains including the Algäu and Vorarlberg, and the whole chain of the Alps. The view at sunset, I was told, is sometimes too beautiful for description to paint or imagination to realise.

So, as far as the view went, I had my walk for nothing. But I had had my glimpse of the Alps that day on first coming to St. Blasien: a second view could not have been more exquisite, might have been less so; and on the whole I hardly knew whether to rejoice or lament. But I felt that anyone wanting rest, repose, and bracing air, would find it at Höchenschwand in no slight measure. The very place to restore the nervous system and give back life and health to an invalid.

As to St. Blasien, it would not have been possible to stay there long. Grand and beautiful as were the pine hills, one felt too much buried, too much oppressed by them. And there was nothing in the hotel itself to tempt one to remain, whilst the bookkeeper was enough to hasten one's departure. Perhaps his nerves wanted a little of the bracing air of Höchenschwand. The season was nearly over at St. Blasien; one carriage load rapidly succeeded another in departing; there had been weeks and weeks of hard work and dry book-keeping. One is willing to make excuses. As the doctor at Gastein once said in his quaint way: "Inexplicable qualities are always a sure sign of hidden malady."

But rest and repose and holiday come to most of us. "Tout vient à qui sait attendre." A few days after I left St. Blasien, the last account in the ledger had been crossed off, and the shutters of the hotel closed until the advent of another season.

## TRYSTING.

Flow softly, silver stream,
While on thy bank I dream
Of her I love;
Sigh softlier, gentle breeze,
Among the ambrosial trees
That wave above.

Fade, thou bright western ray,
And let the glorious day
In night's dear arms
Die, while the nightingale,
Beneath the starshine pale,
The twilight charms.

My love shall come to me:
Here, 'neath our trysting-tree,
For her I wait;
Bright in her beauteous youth,
Strong in sweet love, and truth
Inviolate.

Oh, may the love on high
From out the sacred sky
A blessing send!
And may bright angel-wings
Through all life's wanderings
Her steps attend!

A. M. H.

# THE LEGEND OF GORIE GRANGE.

I AM not superstitious, and I flatter myself that I am not weak-minded; in fact, I do not believe that I am deficient in either moral or physical courage. Show me my foe, and I am always ready and willing to grapple him. Still, there is with most of us, I fancy, a shrinking from anything supernatural, and I am not altogether free from the feeling myself. Yet I would have you to understand that I am not a bit of a coward. I wish most especially to impress this upon your minds. I am *not* a coward—I repeat it; but I am *short*.

Yes, I must confess it, I am altogether a *small* man, and therefore, although my courage is of the best quality, I am placed sometimes at an unfair disadvantage.

However, what I lack in size I make up for in conversation. Everyone knows Anthony Hare is a great talker. Without being conceited, I believe I may say with truth that I am a most amusing little man, and a favourite in society.

I am not a rich man, neither am I a very poor one. What I have is a certainty; besides which, I have prospects.

My three paternal aunts are very fond of me. I am their only masculine relation, and in consequence they think a good deal of me. They are cheery old damsels, above middle age, marvels of juvenility in dress and manners, and sprightly as kittens.

They resided, generally, in an old red-brick house which they had inherited from their mother's family, and which had, like most old country houses, a legend attached to it. But to unravel the truth of the story was more than my aunts had been able to do, there were so many varieties in its telling. It ran something to this effect:

The great great maternal grandfather of these old ladies had owned property in the West Indies, and when returning to England he brought home with him his negro servant, and went down into Blankshire to reside in the very red-brick house now inhabited by the Miss Hares—Gorie Grange.

It was said that their great-great-grandfather, whose name was Rowe, had brought home with him untold wealth, but his style of living certainly proclaimed no such thing.

It was moreover asserted that Mr. Rowe was a miser, and had hidden his money-bags where he believed no one would think of looking for them, but that his servant, with a black man's cunning, had ferreted out the secret. These money-bags were much talked of in the neighbourhood, but no signs of wealth became visible in Mr. Rowe's mode of life.

He had chosen his own rooms in a wing which was almost detached from the rest of the house, and there he lived a most isolated life.

No visitors were invited to the Grange, and the old man had only his servant Sambo and an ancient housekeeper to wait upon him.

Mr. Rowe was about seventy years of age, and had for many years been a widower. His only son he had left attending to his West Indian property, so he might almost be said to be alone in the world.

One morning, about twelve months after Mr. Rowe's arrival at the Grange, finding that her master did not come down to breakfast, and seeing nothing of Sambo, the antiquated housekeeper crawled up the stairs, as well as her "rheumatics" would let her, and tapped at Mr. Rowe's bed-room door. There was no reply.

Again and again she knocked, but with no result, and then she essayed to open the door. To her surprise it yielded at once, and as she had used some force, expecting resistance, she went in much more quickly than was at all comfortable to her rheumatic limbs, and fell heavily against the bottom of the four-post oaken bedstead, which filled up a large space in the room.

Whether she was stunned she hardly knew; but as she lay there, unable to rise, a great horror came upon her. She felt that she was in the presence of a terrible scene, and yet she had not the sense to understand it, or take it wholly in.

She crept from the room like a stricken animal, never attempting to rise, but crawling away, looking back over her shoulder from time to time as if she feared to be followed by—Something. In this way she must have regained her kitchen, for there the gardener found her some hours later, coiled up before the dying embers of the fire, crouching almost against the bars of the grate. He shook her by the shoulder, and she started violently, and began to shiver. That some deed of horror had been enacted in the house he at once perceived, but of what nature he could not gather from the terror-stricken old woman.

He went away and obtained assistance. The report that a tragedy had taken place at Gorie Grange soon spread, and even as the horrible has great powers of attraction, the gardener quickly found volunteers in plenty to accompany him in his voyage of discovery round the old house.

In Mr. Rowe's bed-room a dreadful sight met their view. The old man was lying upon the floor with his throat cut. From all appearances the fearful act must have been committed while he was in bed, probably when he was asleep, but it had failed to kill him at once. The old man was powerful and not easily subdued, nor easily killed. To judge by the disturbed state of the room, even after he had received his death-wound there had been a severe struggle.

That Mr. Rowe had been murdered seemed certain, and so the inquest pronounced. Some few there were who averred a belief that he had committed suicide, but all the evidence, medical and

otherwise, pointed to murder. The old housekeeper told what little she knew, and little indeed that was, as we have already seen.

One of the most strange features of the case was that Sambo had never been seen or heard of after this shocking event had taken place, and neither dead nor alive was he to be found. Had he killed his master and absconded with his gold, or had he shared the same fate? If so, what had become of him?

The police were not then what the police are now. Still they appeared to do their utmost to find a clue to the mystery, but without success; and from that time, only the legend was left of the great great maternal grandfather of my aunts.

Mr. Rowe's son in the West Indies never came home at all, and Gorie Grange was shut up. Years afterwards *his* son claimed the property, and no one appeared to have any desire to dispute his right to it. In due course he settled there, but from what I can learn, the wing where the tragedy had been enacted had been used by him only as lumber rooms. Whether this was in consequence of the ghastly story attached to them, or whether he had plenty of rooms without them, I cannot say.

This gentleman was the grandfather of my three aunts, and he had no sons. He left the place to his only daughter, and from her (their own mother) the Miss Hares had inherited it, with the legend attached thereto. But the effects of such stories wane with age, and my aunts thought and cared little about their great-great-grandfather, and probably gave small credence to the blood-stained tale.

So long as their mother lived (and a very long time that was) there was no talk of awaking the echoes of those unused rooms, shut off as they were from the rest of the house.

The old four-post bedstead still stood there. It was too massive to decay, and too handsome to destroy, with its rich and rare carving, and too unwieldy to move; so they left it alone. My aunts had lived much at the Grange, and a little in London. I had spent a portion of my time with them yearly, in one place or the other, but I gave the preference to their cosey London residence, small though it was.

As I have said before, I was a favourite with my aunts; I did my best to amuse them, and I suppose I succeeded. I was what is commonly, but surely erroneously, called "an idle man." And yet no man could be more busy.

What is it I do? Well, really, the things are so numerous that I cannot exactly say. But one fact I *will* mention: I never have a moment to call my own. And yet everyone dubs me "an idle man." It is a little annoying, but it can't be helped, I suppose, as I cannot proclaim that I am a baker, or a butcher, or a lawyer, or a clerk in the Admiralty, or that I belong to any other definite trade or profession.

My aunts, however, seemed rather proud of the fact; and the dear old souls set to work, as soon as the Grange became their

own property, to give me a home with them. I knew nothing abou it at all; but they sent for painters, plasterers, and whitewashers, who were followed by decorators and upholsterers, and the discarded wing was restored and refurnished.

There was only one article of the old furniture left, and that was the large ancient bedstead. Its carving was so beautiful that they thought I should like to retain it. It looked like one of the old state bedsteads from Hampton Court stranded among the pretty modern furniture. The suite of rooms, three in number, was prepared for me. I knew I ought to be grateful to my aunts for their kindness, and yet I must confess I felt uncomfortable.

First, I preferred being my own master; secondly, I hated the country. Lamp-posts were far more congenial to my taste than trees; pavements to green fields and muddy lanes. And thirdly, as the door of communication with the old wing closed after me with a spring, the story of the murder (which I had not thought of for years) rushed into my mind, with all its horrors crowding fast and thick one upon the other.

But there stood my smiling aunts, and what could I say? except how kind this surprise of theirs was, and how pretty I thought all the things they had selected for my use, and how little I deserved all they had done for me. I made my small speeches cheerfully, but there was a dull weight at my heart. I did not like at all being the first sleeper in these apartments. I vowed to myself that at least that spring door should not close me in. I would drive a staple into the wall and fasten it back—a fact I accomplished before bedtime; after which I felt happier.

I took great pains to prevent my aunts fancying that I had any dislike to my new quarters. In fact, as the evening wore on, I had almost ceased to think about it. I ate a good dinner at seven o'clock, my aunts bringing some of their best wine from the cellar in honour of the occasion, and I drank freely. Never was I more brilliant. I kept them, and a few friends whom they had invited to meet me, in constant roars of laughter. I made myself agreeable and amusing to all, as I can do when I like. The dinner and evening were both a success.

Some of the departing guests of the sterner sex prepared themselves for a cold drive by a glass of hot brandy-and-water, in which I joined them. After they had all gone, I took just one more for a "nightcap"; kissed my aunts all round, and amidst their reiterated kind wishes that I might have a good night and be comfortable, &c., &c., &c., I lighted my candle and went off to my solitary wing.

I looked at the door of communication and saw, to my satisfaction, that it was fastened back quite safely. "If it had been open thus the night that poor old man was murdered," I thought, "his screams could easily have been heard all over the house." And then I went

into my room and shut the door. A fire was burning in the grate and the window curtains were closed. Now, if there is one thing I dislike, it is to sleep in a darkened room. In strange houses I often indulge in a night-light, but on this occasion I had not one. So I went to the window, opened the curtains, drew up the blind, and looked out into the starlit night, and saw with joy the promise of a rising moon. I inspected the furniture of my room minutely.

The bed was some distance from the wall, a fact which I thought might be attributable to the skirting board, which projected. I examined the old carving upon the bedstead, and acknowledged it to be beautiful. Still, somehow, I wished it out of the room, for surely it had seen the deed of blood which had been committed there.

It was the only witness left, but there it stood, silent and sombre, as though the scene was unforgotten which had taken place so long ago—so long ago.

I had no desire to hasten to bed. It reminded me of a large plumed hearse. But my candles were burning low, and there was nothing for it but to hurry between the sheets. Once there, sleep soon fell upon me and thought was obliterated.

How long I slept I know not, but suddenly a sensation of horror overcame me. I felt as though I were chained to the spot; spell-bound; unable to move hand or foot. The moon was shining with a cold white light into the room; it fell upon the lower curtains of my bed, making them seem like spectres. It gleamed with an unearthly whiteness across the bed itself, and from thence across the room, glancing upon the white panels of the door; I was constrained to follow its course, and observe upon what it shone.

Nothing but the door; I could see its gilt beadings. Nothing but the door. Still it had a horrible fascination for me, and I watched it, though I strove with all my might to look away. I could not. All my senses were centred upon it; it enchained me—it *drew* me. By degrees I sat up, my eyes riveted upon it. Great Heaven! was it my fancy? was I going mad?

It opened—slowly; how slowly and stealthily! . . . I was in an agony.

I clutched at the bed-clothes with my clammy, death-cold hands; great drops of sweat broke out upon my brow. The moon shone whiter and more coldly than ever, and from behind the door cautiously there peered in—*the face of a black man.*

He rolled his large dark eyes around the room, and the moon shimmered upon them as they turned round and round in their sockets, and at last fastened themselves on *me* with a demoniac glare.

Never before I suffered as at that moment. I strove to scream—it was in vain my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth. I could utter no sound.

His hand crept round the door, and gleaming there in the moon-

light with a cruel flash, I saw a long slender knife. Still I could not speak.

He entered the room; a large powerful negro. He turned his back to me, and noiselessly closed the door. I made a superhuman effort; I struggled to free myself from the fearful terror which rendered me powerless to save my life. I sprang from the bed, thanking God there was room for me behind it, and my awful visitor advanced in the moonlight as I crept yet closer against the wall. I could see him between the curtains. He had not noticed that I had deserted the bed.

He stood beside it, and a cruel laugh broke from him; his white ferocious teeth glistening like those of a wild beast. His eye-balls seemed to emit fire. With a devilish chuckle he raised his knife, and brought it down suddenly into the shadow where I had lain.

A cold shiver ran through me; my teeth chattered in my head; my knees shook under me. Nothing but my intense fear, and an instinct of self-preservation, prevented me from fainting. He drew out his dagger-like knife, and looked upon it eagerly for my life-blood—it was not there. He crouched like a tiger about to spring upon his victim, a wild beast baulked of his prey; his breath came thick and hot and furious; it rose like steam from his dilated nostrils. I watched him, I could not help it. I felt I *must* see what he was about, even if it cost me my life.

Suddenly he discovered me, and crept after me with a cat-like movement behind the bed. As he followed me I moved on, hiding by turns behind the curtains. We both kept stopping to look where the other was, and each time, between the curtains, I met his cruel rolling eyes and his demoniacal grin.

He was gaining upon me! I never stayed to look at him now, and yet I could see the horrible gleam of his eyes and teeth as he rushed on through the moonlight. I could feel his breath upon my neck as he pressed after me more closely. On I sped for my life, faster, faster, faster. The whole room seemed to be whirling round, and everything in it; and I could go no quicker; yet I knew that he gained upon me. I flung up my eyes wildly; I saw the flash and gleam of his upraised knife; I felt that it was descending—I shut my eyes that I might not see it—but I could utter no sound. It fell with a cruel, sharp, sudden pain, and I sprang forward with a fearful, prolonged yell.

My screams resounded through the old house, scream upon scream; awaking my aunts and the servants, from sound slumber into terrified consciousness. They huddled together in groups of peculiar, if not picturesque, costumes; and still my unearthly screams fell upon their ears. They armed themselves with pokers and other fire-irons, the butler manfully taking the lead with a loaded revolver.

Thus this motley crew entered my room. I was screaming still

sitting up in bed, staring in front of me with dilated, terrified eyes. The women servants who carried lamps raised them, and they looked at me. The unusual noise and the moving lights quickly aroused me, together with my aunts' voices.

"Tony, Tony!" they exclaimed, "what is the matter? What have you seen?"

"Matter enough," I replied foolishly. "I have seen Sambo's ghost!"

The women servants shrank closer together, and shivered, and all present exchanged uncomfortable glances, while the butler, finding his enemy could not be reached with powder and shot, showed no inclination to remain in the ghostly precincts.

As I looked at the rampant curl papers of my aunts, a sense of the ludicrous overcame me, and I began to laugh.

"Poor dear, he is quite hysterical," cried one of them anxiously. "You shall never sleep here again, Tony, be sure of that."

But I couldn't help laughing still, for the curl papers were so animated.

Nothing would persuade the dear old ladies but that I should be very ill, and they hustled me into a dressing-gown, and hurried me out of the room to a snug little box near their own, where my clothes were deposited by the butler, who could not, however, be induced to go back for my razors and brushes, which he had forgotten, but promised to fetch them in the morning.

The door of communication with the haunted wing was locked and bolted, and those who had beds returned to them, while I rolled myself up in my railway rug, and finished my night in an easy chair.

I have told you before that I am not a coward; and I should have had no objection to resume my sleep on the old oak bedstead. But my aunts were obdurate; they would not permit it.

The next morning, at breakfast, my eldest aunt began. "Anthony, we're going to pull it down."

"Pull it down?" I repeated; "pull what down, Aunt Jem?"

"Why, the wing to be sure—what else?"

"Pull down the wing?" I echoed aghast; "just after having it all so beautifully done up—and for me, too! Oh, nonsense, my dear aunt; what is the matter with it?"

"My dear Anthony, it shan't stand one brick upon another after what happened last night."

"Well, and what *did* happen, do you think?"

"You saw—oh, I can't bear to speak of it, it is too dreadful—and I never believed in it: really I never did."

"Believed in what?" I questioned.

"Why, in the legend attached to this house."

"Nor have I," I replied quietly, "and never will."

"What! not after seeing it?" cried all my aunts in a breath.

"I did nothing of the kind, my dear aunts. It was a dream: nothing but a nightmare, I can assure you. I ate veal for dinner,

and it never agrees with my digestion. Don't give it me again, and I shall see no more of my friend Sambo. He is a ferocious-looking fellow, and once was quite enough, I can tell you."

But all I could say was of no avail. Another bed-room was prepared for me, and orders were that very day issued for the destruction of the old wing, which had held its own against time and tradition so long. I continued to expostulate. It seemed such a pity to pull down the place because I had dreamt that Sambo had paid me a visit; and so I told my aunts.

"You may call it a dream, Tony," said Aunt Jem, solemnly, "but *we* consider it a *vision*. It ought to have been razed to the ground long and long since."

What was to be done with the bedstead and all its wonderful old carving? I begged that it might be preserved, it was so handsome. It would make into a splendid sideboard, book-shelves, and dinner-waggons. But my aunts were resolute. If the story were true at all, the murder had been committed on that very bed; it should be burnt. They had kept it, believing the legend to be a romance; but now they had changed their opinion, and nothing should remain connected with that deed of blood. I felt a sort of pity for the noble bedstead, and for the old rooms too, since it was through me that they were to be demolished.

The modern furniture had been removed to the other part of the house, and the work of destruction was about to begin. I felt constrained to go and look on at it. I found the workmen were already roughly pulling down the royal old bedstead. I should have liked to save it even now, but I could hit upon no plan to induce my aunts to change their rather strong minds.

One of the posts fell heavily, and the whole fabric came down with a great crash, falling partly against the wall and the projecting skirting-board. I noticed a sharp click, and wondered what it could be, but amid the noise of the falling oak it was not heeded by the workmen. When the wreck of the bedstead was removed, I saw that the slanting skirting-board had shifted, and pointed it out to one of the men.

They gathered round and examined it, seemingly much puzzled; for the board had a concealed spring which had burst open from the sudden concussion. The builder, after looking at it for a few moments in silence, carelessly replaced the skirting-board, saying there was nothing to stare at in that.

But when the old bedstead was safely out of the way, he ordered the men to continue their work of demolition elsewhere, and then he came and touched me on the arm.

"Is there any truth, sir, in the tale that people tell about the murder of an old miser in this room?"

"You have asked a question I cannot answer," I replied. "My aunts' great-great-grandfather, Mr. Rowe, is *said* to have been murdered

here by his negro servant, and because I dreamt I saw Sambo the other night, my dear old aunts *will* pull the place down."

"Perhaps they are right, sir," answered the builder. "Have you any objection to telling me all you have heard about the murder?"

"Not in the least, if you really care to hear such rubbish." And I told him in as few words as I could.

"And now, sir, would you think me impertinent if I beg you to tell me your dream."

I was rather amused at the request, but I did as he asked me.

He listened attentively, then regarded me gravely. "That was no dream, sir; there is more in this than you seem to think. I should not be surprised if we come upon something in pulling down this wing. At any rate, I should like to work out the meaning of this spring in the skirting-board."

"All right," I laughed. "Do as you like, and I'll see fair play."

The builder lay down upon the floor, removed the board, and peered in; after a few moments he glanced sharply round the room, and his eyes rested on a cupboard.

He at once rose and went to it; opening the door he remarked quietly:

"Ah! I thought as much."

I followed him and looked over his shoulder. The back of the cupboard had swung round, and there was a narrow passage beyond. We both gazed eagerly into it, but it was dark as night.

"We must have a lantern," he said, and I offered to fetch one; an offer which he accepted, and remained on guard at the door. It was some time before I returned, for a lantern could not at first be found. When I did, he was still waiting by the cupboard.

We crept along the narrow passage, he leading the way with the light. The air was damp and offensive.

"Let us get out of this horrid hole," I gasped, hardly able to breathe in the close, foul atmosphere.

The passage, which had been so narrow as barely to admit of our shoulders, now turned two ways. One down some steep steps, and the other up some scarcely less steep. We therefore descended slowly, for it was very slippery. We were brought up suddenly by a thick, clamped door in the wall.

"This has been a secret entrance, evidently," said the builder; "but the bars are rusted in, and the key is gone."

"I have never noticed it from the outside," I answered.

"It is covered with ivy, centuries old," he replied, quietly. "You would not be likely to *see* it, but I am not surprised to find it is there."

"You seem surprised at nothing," I remarked rather testily, for the man's calm superiority of manner irritated me.

"I certainly suspected there was a passage there; I will tell you why when I can breathe better, sir. Will you kindly take the

lantern. You will have to lead now; there is not room for me to pass you."

I had to do as I was requested; there was no choice in the matter; but I confess I preferred the builder's being in front; he was twice my size, and therefore it seemed more fitting that he should be the leader.

"Shall we go back?" I asked. "I am stifled."

"We had better go up the steps," he replied; and I could not refuse.

At the top of them there was quite a little lobby, and I felt glad to get out of the narrow passage; so I stepped on quickly without looking where I went. My feet caught in something on the ground, and I nearly fell down; the lantern came in contact with the wall and was extinguished. It was horrible to be thus shut up in the dark in a place worse than the worst of dungeons, and I felt as sick as death.

"Have you dropped the lantern?" asked the builder, quietly. "It will be bad travelling back without it, but I suppose I must try."

"For Heaven's sake don't leave me in this forsaken place," I cried.

"Try and find the lantern then, sir; I will strike a match."

He did so, and held it up; I groped for the lantern in the dim light it shed, and clasped something; I raised it towards the match.

"Great heavens!" I screamed, "what is it?"

But before he could distinguish what I held in my hand the flickering match had burnt out. I had seen it, and let it drop in horror. *It was a human skull.*

I remembered nothing more for some time. When I recovered my senses the lantern was again alight, and I was still in the horrible dark dungeon. The builder was examining an iron safe which was fitted into a niche in the wall; the lid was open, and it was filled with golden coins; many of them were scattered upon the loathsome floor, and the hands of the skeleton lying there seemed to be grasping them, even in death, to judge by the bent, clutching fingers. The key was in the iron safe, but it would not turn, it was rusted into the lock.

"For mercy's sake let us get out," I murmured.

He looked at me keenly, and then took up the lantern and led the way back. I followed him as quickly as the trembling of my limbs would permit me, and at length I stood in the light of day again and felt thankful.

"We had better not close this place yet," my companion said; "we might find it less easy to open another time. I suppose we can lock the door of the room, sir?"

I gladly gave consent, and took the builder into the library to talk over what we had found and seen; but before I spoke a word I rang

for brandy. I drank a glass down without water; the builder diluted his, and sipped it slowly.

I looked at him with interest. He was a stranger to me. I found him to be a shrewd Scotchman, reserved and grave in manner, a firm believer in spirits and in all things ghostly.

He had noted that the measurements of the rooms, when added together, did not tally with the external measurements of the house; and he had pondered over the problem, and come to the conclusion that there must be either a room bricked up there, or a secret passage; but as it was no business of his, he had not mentioned his thoughts to anyone.

When, however, he was ordered to pull down the wing, and demolish his own just-finished work, and the spring panel had come to light, he had considered it his duty to do what he had done. This he told me in a few straightforward words.

"The money must be removed before the men begin their work," he said. "They had better know nothing about it, sir."

"Will it be possible to keep it from their knowledge?" I answered. "We must send for the police, I suppose."

"I should advise you to do nothing of the kind, sir. The story would be all over the country in less than a week, and your aunts would never fancy their home again. My doctor wants a skeleton; you can let him have this one. Were I in your place I should not tell the Miss Hares anything about it."

"But, my good fellow, all that accursed gold is theirs, not mine; they *must* be told."

"About the gold, yes; but about the bones, no, sir. The gold is good enough; that won't hurt them."

"Unless they are murdered for it, as their great-great-grandfather was," I put in.

"People don't keep their money by them very often now," said the builder. "They will of course invest it. Still, to my mind, the less said about it the better."

"Mr. Macdonald," I asked, turning to him, "do you think that *is* the skeleton of my old ancestor's murderer?"

"Undoubtedly I do," he replied.

"Then how was he shut in there to die?"

"I have thought of that," he answered calmly: "I should fancy the murderer had left his victim for dead, and gone after the coveted gold. The old man, however, was still alive, and seeing the door leading to his treasure open, his ruling passion was strong in death, and he managed to drag himself to the cupboard to shut it, taking the knife with him for protection against some dreaded foe. Or he may have known that his servant was in there stealing his money, and shut him in out of revenge. Whichever way it was, Sambo supposed his master to be dead, or he would not have ventured down that passage with the chance of being shut in."

"How do you know it *is* Sambo?" I asked curiously. "You speak as though you were certain upon the subject."

"I am," he replied gravely. "Have you forgotten your vision?"

"Vision!" I answered; "it was the nightmare; nothing else, I assure you. I had eaten veal, and it never agrees with me."

Mr. Macdonald smiled quietly.

"Call it what you please, sir, it makes no difference."

Well! there is not much more to tell.

The doctor was taken into our confidence, and came by night for Sambo's bones. I saw them afterwards in a carved oaken case in his surgery.

"Why, I declare this is some of the old bedstead," I exclaimed.

"Yes," he replied, laughing, "I saw them burning it, and begged some bits of the workmen. I only wish I had come sooner, I would have had more; and then the idea struck me to have it made into a house for Mr. Sambo."

"This *is* a queer world," I murmured. "The very bed he murdered the poor old man on has become the wretch's own coffin at last."

"Retribution, my dear sir, no doubt. It is *sure* to follow some time or other. It makes one moralize, doesn't it?"

I looked at the doctor, and more than half thought he was quizzing me, but I could not be sure. He was one of those men you could never tell whether he was in earnest or not.

Mr. Macdonald and I of course told my aunts of our wonderful find. Fifty thousand pounds, all in gold. They were of course delighted, and believed to the day of their deaths that Sambo had appeared to tell me of the hidden treasure.

A thousand pounds they presented to the builder for his help and assistance, much to his surprise and gratification, for, to do the honest fellow justice, he did not expect any reward. He had acted only as he thought right.

Ten thousand pounds they invested in my name, and the same amount was settled on each of themselves. With the remainder they built and endowed some almshouses, which they named "The Rowe Charity."

The old wing was levelled to the ground. The bricks were carted away, and no more has ever been heard of Sambo.

Still I say now as I said then: I do not believe in ghosts, and my nocturnal visitor was nothing more or less than a veal-begotten dream.

# TWO WIVES.

SOME forty years ago, before the railway from Paris to Marseilles was even dreamt of, one of the couriers in the service of the malle-poste plying between the two cities was a good-looking fellow, named Jean Picot. Deservedly a favourite with his employers on account of his strict attention to his duties, he was not less popular with the travellers entrusted twice a week to his care during the long and tedious journey from one town to the other. This popularity was partly owing to his imperturbable good humour, and partly to the inexhaustible store of anecdote concerning the different localities and their inhabitants, with the relation of which he was wont to entertain them.

At the time of his introduction to the reader he was about five-and-thirty years of age, and had occupied his post of courier, after having previously filled various subordinate offices to the satisfaction of his patrons, for the last eighteen months. He was active, intelligent, trustworthy, and we might almost add irreproachable, but for one slight infraction of the established social code, which, we regret to say, he regarded in the light of a venial peccadillo, but whereof he was indisputably guilty. He had two wives, one in Paris and the other at Marseilles.

The first, sole legitimate possessor of his affections, Julie by name, was the owner of a small but thriving millinery business in the Rue des Petites Ecuries, and had already gratified her husband, to whom she had been married eight or nine years, with two children, a boy and a girl. She was a fair-haired, comely little woman, devotedly attached to her Jean, and welcoming him on his return from his bi-weekly expedition with a delight too visible to be otherwise than genuine. Nothing was too good for him; his favourite dishes (for he was a bit of a gourmand) awaited him on his arrival, and during his stay in the conjugal domicile every attention to his personal comfort was lavishly bestowed on him.

It is, therefore, not surprising that the contrast between the cosey entre-sol and the dismal chamber of a fifth-rate inn where he was accustomed to put up at Marseilles, rendered his periodical sojourn in the latter city the reverse of agreeable, and induced him to profit by the limited hospitality of the Aigle d'Or as little as he possibly could.

Being by no means misanthropically inclined towards his fellow creatures, he gradually enlarged his circle of acquaintance by frequenting a certain café, or, rather, wine shop on the quay, where sailors and fishermen of the Cannebière were wont to congregate. He became especially intimate with one of the latter, Antoine Caussade, a smart young fellow of six-and-twenty, who inhabited,

together with his sister, a prettily situated and vine-clad cottage about half a mile from the port, and occasionally invited the courier to partake of their evening meal.

Marguerite Caussade was three years younger than her brother, and a magnificent specimen of meridional beauty. Tall, lustrous-eyed, and slenderly but symmetrically shaped, every movement of her lithe and elastic figure displayed in perfection that unstudied grace peculiar to the children of the South, while her rare personal attractions were enhanced by the gay colours and picturesque costume she invariably wore.

This bright and dazzling vision, different from anything he had previously seen, had a singular charm for our friend Picot, and every hour passed in her society only tended to strengthen the impression produced on him by the fascinating damsel. Her qualities, moreover, as an excellent housewife, and particularly her culinary skill—for no one could season the national "bouillabaisse" so exactly to his taste—were the more cordially appreciated by him when mentally compared with the slatternly maid-of-all-work and tasteless fare to which the guests of the Aigle d'Or were inexorably condemned.

Little by little, the idea suggested itself to him—at first vaguely, and in course of time, forcibly—how pleasant it would be to exchange his gloomy quarters for a cheerful home, presided over by a "neat-handed Phyllis" like Marguerite, to find his wants and wishes lovingly anticipated, and enjoy his "bouillabaisse" not merely as an occasional treat, but as a recompense on the termination of each fatiguing journey. The more he pondered over the possibility of realising so desirable a state of things, the easier it appeared. Neither Antoine nor his sister had the remotest conception that he was already enrolled among the confraternity of Benedicts, and he could perceive pretty clearly from divers signs and tokens that it only rested with him to say the word which both of them were anxiously expecting.

As to the illegality of the project, we are ashamed to confess that he regarded it as a secondary consideration, the sole obstacle that seriously preoccupied him being the chance of ultimate discovery. The distance, however, between Paris and Marseilles tolerably reassured him on this head; and the further reflection that the few people at home who were acquainted with his real position would as soon think of visiting the Cannebière as of undertaking a voyage to the Antipodes completely tranquillised him.

If now and then he felt a qualm of conscience when he thought of the unsuspecting Julie, he soon succeeded in allaying it by the specious reasoning that she would be none the worse for it; inasmuch as his attention to the ménage of the Rue des Petites Ecuries would assuredly suffer no diminution, while the risk, if any, that might attend the carrying out of his intention would be absolutely and exclusively his own. Having thus stilled the reproaches of his inward monitor, and provided himself with the necessary papers and certifi-

cates for the satisfaction of the local authorities, his next step was to secure the consent of his lady love and that of her brother, in both cases a foregone conclusion; the latter responding to his request with a hearty "Tope!" while the fair maiden's assent was expressed by an equally monosyllabic "Té!"

After so inexcusable a forgetfulness of his conjugal obligations, it might have been supposed that, Sybarite though he was, the faithless husband would have experienced some sensation of remorse, or, at the very least, of embarrassment on returning home. Nothing, however, was farther from his thoughts. During the last stage of his journey, and more particularly as he crossed the Paris barrier, what had happened at Marseilles, by some process peculiar to his volatile temperament, little by little faded away from his memory, like an indistinct dream, and left him at liberty to dwell with pleasurable anticipation on the welcome he was about to receive from the attractive Julie.

The poet's assertion that "distance lends enchantment to the view" was, in his case, inapplicable. Once in the familiar entre-sol, surrounded by his wife and the two pledges of her affection—not to mention a daintily appointed supper—he dismissed from his mind with easy indifference all recollection of the Cannebière cottage and its inmates; and if, in spite of himself, a doubt occasionally arose as to the relative merits of brune or blonde, decided unhesitatingly in favour of the latter. When, on the other hand, his road lay in the opposite direction, and every moment brought him nearer to his southern haven, his recollections of the dark-eyed Marguerite, and of a certain "matelotte à la Provençale," in the preparation of which she especially excelled, grew more and more vivid. And had he then been asked his opinion as to the "nuance" most indicative of feminine beauty, we are afraid that poor Julie and her sister blondes would scarcely have borne away the palm.

During several years, in the course of which two events occurred, namely, the birth of Marguerite's first and only child, and the sudden death of her brother in a storm at sea, the double union remained unsuspected by the rival fair ones; and would probably have continued so until the end of the chapter, had not the courier himself imprudently betrayed his secret. Meeting by chance on the Boulevard an old acquaintance of the Aigle d' Or, he invited him in a moment of expansive hospitality to dine with him at the house of a lady friend; and introduced him without further ceremony to his snug apartment in the Rue des Petites Ecuries, where Julie, in compliance with her husband's instructions, had superintended the preparation of an excellent repast. At dessert, Picot having left the room on a supplementary visit to the cellar, M. Cabassol—for such was the name of the guest—who had already profited largely by his host's Burgundy, began to expatiate on the delights of his native city.

"Madame has never been to Marseilles?" he inquired.

"Never, Monsieur," replied Julie. "It is a long journey, and, as

you know, we Parisiennes are generally quite content with what we have at home."

"Et que vous avez raison, cadédis!" exclaimed Cabassol. "But Marseilles, Madame, Marseilles is worth ten times the journey, if only on account of its Cannebière. Ah, Madame, if Paris had but a Cannebière, it would be almost a little Marseilles!"

Here the speaker paused for breath and a refreshing onslaught on the bottle near him, then resumed. "Besides, you would have the felicity of becoming acquainted with the beautiful and charming Madame Picot."

Julie stared in astonishment, doubting if she had heard aright. "I beg your pardon," she said, "I did not quite catch what you were saying."

"Té, madame, I was speaking of your friend's wife, Marguerite Caussade, that was, the sister of poor Antoine, and the pearl of the Cannebière, be the other who she may. Such eyes, such hair, such a figure! Ah, Madame, when you have seen her, you will own that Picot is a lucky fellow!"

"Indeed!" faltered Julie, striving to master her emotion; "I was not aware that——"

At this interesting point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of her husband, followed shortly after by the breaking up of the little party. The courier proposing to his companion an adjournment to a neighbouring estaminet, to which M. Cabassol joyfully consenting, the mistress of the house was left alone with her by no means agreeable reflections.

Could it be true? she thought; impossible! and yet, the details were so precise that there must be some foundation for the story. Could Jean have been so treacherous as to inflict upon her and her children so grievous a wrong? One thing was evident, she could no longer endure uncertainty; she must trace the calumny—if calumny it was—to its source; and, above all, secretly, and without betraying her project either by word or look. It was, she felt, hard to dissemble, but she must bide her time, and carefully conceal every sign of suspicion until an opportunity offered of penetrating the mystery. So that, when her husband returned, her countenance bore no trace of the resentment which inwardly tormented her. She listened with forced composure while he complacently related Cabassol's utter discomfiture at billiards, and even contrived on his departure next day for Marseilles to bid him adieu with a more than usual display of affection.

Once freed from his presence, and no longer under the necessity of disguising her feelings, she gave full vent to the indignation she had hitherto suppressed, and was for some hours incapable of conceiving any feasible idea whereby the truth or falsehood of the tale might be effectually ascertained. In the midst of her anguish, however, a thought flashed upon her. Why should she not herself repair to Marseilles, and confront her rival, this Marguerite Caussade, whose surpassing beauty had been so enthusiastically described by Cabassol?

It would be easy to invent some plausible pretext for her absence, and to reach her destination when her husband should have started on his homeward journey, even at the risk of crossing him on the road.

Her plan thus arranged, she lost no time in carrying it into execution. And, precisely at the moment when Picot with his two passengers drove out of the court-yard of the Marseilles bureau, she entrusted herself and her modest baggage to the care of his Paris colleague, leaving behind her a letter announcing her departure for a three days' visit to an aunt at Rouen, who had been suddenly taken ill. About half way the malles-poste crossed each other; and, through the thick veil which she wore for precaution's sake, she beheld her faithless husband chatting gaily with the travellers. The two couriers exchanged a word of salutation, and sped rapidly on their several ways.

The journey was long and tedious to one wholly unaccustomed to locomotion; and Julie's first thought on her arrival at Marseilles was to engage a room in one of the hotels adjoining the messageries, and fortify herself for the coming interview by a short but necessary repose. She had little difficulty, on repairing to the Cannebière, in discovering the abode of the person of whom she was in quest; and, in spite of her preoccupation, could not help being struck by the picturesque locality of the one-storied cottage, enclosed in its tiny garden, and entirely covered with luxuriant creepers. When she was ushered into the simply but tastefully furnished chamber, of which Marguerite and a lovely little girl, apparently about eighteen months old, were the sole occupants, she paused involuntarily on the threshold, unable to refrain from gazing with a feeling of mingled admiration and jealousy at the gay costume and exquisite beauty of her rival. Recovering herself by an effort, she gravely returned her hostess's salutation, and for a moment the two women surveyed each other in silence. Julie was the first to speak.

"You are Marguerite Caussade," she said.

"That was my name," replied the Marseillaise, in her melodious southern accent; "I am now called Madame Picot."

"By what right?"

Marguerite's eyes flashed angrily, and her lips curled defiantly as she answered: "By a right that no one can question—by my marriage certificate. Why do you ask?"

"Show it to me, if you can," pursued Julie in a scornful tone; "but you well know that is impossible. Jean Picot has only one wife, and you see her before you. If you doubt my word," she added, producing a paper from the folds of her dress, and handing it to the other for inspection, "read this. You will scarcely need any further proof."

Marguerite took the paper, and glanced first at Julie and then at its contents. "Great heavens!" she exclaimed, "what is this!" Then, hastening to a cabinet in a corner of the room, she drew from one

of the drawers a document exactly similar, and after rapidly examining the dates of each, sank on a chair and wept bitterly. "He has deceived me!" she sobbed, as if her heart would break; then, suddenly starting up, as if reproaching herself for her credulity: "No, no," she cried, "this paper is a forgery; it cannot be real!"

"Look at it again," said Julie, more touched by her impassioned accents than she would have cared to confess. "If he has deceived you, I do not. While I live, Jean can have no other wife. Listen to me."

"Not another word," interrupted Marguerite, with a gesture of supreme contempt. "I have already listened too long, and blush for having done so. You thought, no doubt, to humiliate me, and triumph over one who has never injured you, but you are mistaken. If your tale be true and there be law in the land, I will be revenged both on him and you."

"And doom the man you love to the galleys," replied Julie calmly. "For you do love him—is it not so?"

"Love him!" echoed Marguerite distractedly, "dearer than life! Is he not the father of my child?"

"The more reason to spare him," was Julie's answer. "Hear me; all may be well yet. This secret is known only to ourselves and him. He must never suspect that we have met; that this painful interview has ever taken place. He is equally dear to both of us, and his safety must be our first, our only consideration. I came hither as your enemy; I go hence as your accomplice, your friend if you will. We may never meet more, but as long as we are true to ourselves there is nothing to fear. Adieu, Marguerite! Remember that whatever happens, you have a sister in Julie."

She was about to depart, when Marguerite in a transport of gratitude would have seized her hand and kissed it. In another moment the two women were locked in a close embrace, and before the Marseillaise could so far master her emotion as to utter a responsive farewell, her visitor had left the room, and she was alone with her little Zoé.

Ten years had passed away since the meeting of the rival claimants, and neither had given Picot the least cause to suspect that his secret was discovered. It was hard for them to dissemble, and so to school themselves as to avoid all allusion to their acquaintance with each other, but their anxiety for the object of their common affection was a safeguard against the slightest indiscretion, and no symptom of change or even embarrassment was visible in their conduct towards him.

Julie's eldest child was now a young man, and already in training for his father's profession. The latter, indeed, was on the point of relinquishing in his favour the post he had so long occupied, and had quitted Paris the day before for one of his last journeys, when

his wife received the following message, forwarded from the malle-poste office :

"Come quickly, not an hour's delay.
"MARGUERITE."

Fearing she knew not what, but conscious that necessity alone could have motived so imperative a summons, Julie, together with her son Victor, by whose influence with the administration an extra carriage had been placed at her disposal, started on the same evening, and found on her arrival at the cottage of the Cannebière her worst apprehensions too painfully realised.

One glance at Marguerite's pale face as she came forward to welcome her, and the sympathetic pressure of her hand, accompanied by a softly murmured thanksgiving that she was not too late, prepared her for the sad spectacle she was about to witness. And when she entered the room where her husband lay on the couch he was never more to quit alive, it seemed to her, as she sank on her knees by his bed-side, that she had long anticipated the agony of that moment, and that her imagination had already pictured even the minutest details of the scene before her. He was lying in a sort of stupor resembling sleep, but which was in reality the result of exhaustion, and his pinched and haggard features bore the unmistakable impress of approaching death. Not a sound disturbed the silence of the chamber save the stifled sobs of Marguerite, who with instinctive delicacy had withdrawn into a corner of the room with Victor, to whom, in a voice broken by emotion, she related what had occurred.

It appeared that, when within a league of Marseilles, the malle-poste had come in contact with a heavily laden waggon, and one of its wheels having been broken by the shock, the occupants of the vehicle had been violently thrown upon a heap of stones by the side of the road. The two passengers, although sorely bruised, had sustained no serious hurt; whereas the unfortunate courier, whose leg had been fractured by the fall, had likewise been so grievously injured in the spine as to preclude all hope of recovery.

On being informed by the surgeon of the sufferer's critical state, Marguerite's first care had been to impart the melancholy tidings to her whose claim on the dying man's affection she could not help acknowledging to be prior to her own, and whose presence would, she felt, be a source of consolation to him in his last moments; and it is only doing her justice to say that, in her anxiety to perform this act of duty, she was mainly influenced by her personal sympathy with Julie.

The latter, meanwhile, resisting all entreaties to partake of the refreshment she so much needed, remained motionless beside her husband, eagerly awaiting his return to consciousness, and inwardly praying for the faintest sign of recognition; but for some time in vain. At length, after a slight and almost inaudible sigh, the sick man's

eyes slowly opened, and his gaze, at first uncertain, gradually became fixed on the figure kneeling by his bed. Little by little an expression of intense happiness overspread his pallid countenance, and, in a voice so low as barely to reach the ears of her to whom it was addressed, he whispered "Julie!"

Scarcely perceptible as it was, the movement of his lips had not escaped the watchful glances of Marguerite. Unable to contain her emotion, she rushed forward, and throwing herself on her knees by the bed-side, burst into a flood of tears. The courier's eyes wandered from one to the other, until they fell upon his son standing a little in the background. "Toi aussi!" he murmured; "c'est bien!" Then, summing up his strength for a final effort, he gasped out: "I leave to thy care my *sister-in-law*," pointing to Marguerite, "and her little one. Love them, as they have loved me!" and with a glance of unutterable tenderness on the two women, sank back on his pillow, his last audible words being "Pardonnez moi!"

CHARLES HERVEY.

## SPRING.

SPRING has come! her rosy fingers
Loosen Winter's icy chain;
Still on hill and height he lingers,
Loth to end his dreary reign.

Spring has come! the birds to greet her
Fill the air with music gay,
Whilst the eager brooks, to meet her,
Chatter down their noisy way.

Spring has come! and as she passes
Round her path, the south wind sighs,
Bloom the flowers and sprout the grasses,
Bud the trees and blush the skies.

Wake, my heart, and join the gladness,
Bring thy tribute to her feet!
Is there room for winter sadness
In a world so young and sweet?

Leave the Past with all its sorrow,
Take the joy To-day can bring;
Night but brings a glad To-morrow,
Winter always ends in Spring.

M. BLANCHE HAYWARD.

ROBERT BARNES. R. AND E. TAYLOR.

A MIDNIGHT CRY.

THE ARGOSY.

*JUNE, 1882.*

# MRS. RAVEN'S TEMPTATION.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE SIGN IN THE WINDOW.

WHEN Louisa Connell woke up the morning following the arrival of the visitors at her father's house, the first thought that flashed upon her was that she had partly agreed to go with Miss Evelyn Agate to consult the Oriental Mystery.

Louisa shrank from the expedition, in spite of the latent inclination that drew her towards it. She did not want to deceive her parents, she did not want to act contrary to Marco Learli's wish; but then she desired to propitiate Evelyn, rather than to offend her, and she herself ardently desired to go. Her parents? Well—as for her parents—she thought she would tell them herself when the adventure was over. Philip would make peace for her. She knew Mrs. Connell could not bear to blame her boys during their brief visits at home. As for Miss Cleare, Louisa decided that she always had a strange way of looking at matters: as if everything must be right or wrong. Would Miss Cleare keep the secret of the clandestine visit? Louisa feared not. Miss Cleare must be put off the track: kept in the dark.

"I'm glad it is a fine morning!" exclaimed Louisa, as she saluted her, when they met. "Some of us must seize the opportunity of taking Miss Agate to the Cave."

This was a locality connected with a legend which Philip had told to Frank and Marco during their journey to Coltburn—the legend of Mary and Stephen, the lovers of Detting: one of whom was simple and the other wicked, and so disaster supervened.

Alice looked up brightly. "Then you have given up that woman!" she said. "I am so glad!"

"I don't suppose anybody will say another word on that subject," returned Louisa, rather shortly. "I'm sure I shall not. I hope no one else will."

Alice thought Miss Connell had been hurt by the little sympathy she had shown with the matter the evening before. But she said nothing, knowing that all wounds heal quicker if not tampered with.

At breakfast, Louisa suggested the visit to the Cave. Philip took up the proposal eagerly, and Evelyn, looking from one to the other, professed her entire delight in falling in with any plan they had formed, provided it was not troublesome to themselves.

"Rather a bright idea, that of yours, Louisa," remarked Philip, later, drawing the two girls for a minute into an adjoining room. "Had we gone out vaguely 'for a walk,' that good little governess of ours might have looked so conscious as to be asked what the trouble was, and while her conscience would have bade her tell the truth, her kindliness would have made it hard to do so. We have no right to give our uncanny secrets to other people to keep. Let us do our own deceits."

Louisa started. Though passing somewhat out of the track of filial duty, she had scarcely seen what would come of going a-drift.

People never drift upwards! In a downward course, we ever seem to be crying "too late!" and only as we leave our "too-lates" behind us do we see that each of them might have been "just in time."

"I do mean to go to the Cave," she answered, colouring.

"Of course, we all do: only we mean to go somewhere else also," observed Evelyn, with a light laugh.

"There won't be much time, then," suggested Philip. "Mother has been too often to the Cave, not to know how long it takes to get there and to explore its beauties. I don't mean that she is likely to watch us to see whether we are out of her sight half-an-hour longer than might be expected," he added, detecting a look that was very like a sneer passing across Evelyn's face, and resenting it; "but in her kindly, innocent way, she'll ask us where we have been and all sorts of things."

"Can't we get the witch herself to the Cave?" cried Evelyn, throwing up her hands in an ecstacy of delight at the bright idea. "Can't we send her word that a party of three wish to consult her there if she will meet them at the time appointed? Then all you say will be strictly true, you know," turning to Louisa, "as you seem so anxious that it should be."

She could not keep the tone of the last words quite free from mockery. Evelyn herself had no conscience, and despised those who had one. She might dislike Alice Cleare, but she despised Louisa Connell.

"A capital plan, if it can be done," acquiesced Louisa. "The

woman could not have the least suspicion as to who we are—she won't even know that we are Coltburn people."

"I'll write the note," Evelyn went on eagerly. "Nobody here knows my hand-writing. But, who is to take it?"

"I," said Philip. Evelyn reflected. She was far-seeing.

"But look here, Mr. Philip, shall you take the letter in? Because, in that case, one need not be written—a message would do as well. And if you don't take it in, how shall we know whether she agrees to go to the Cave or not?"

Philip had not thought of this.

"You see the difficulty, do you not?"

"Yes, I see it," said Philip; "but I do not want to see *her*. Whatever she may be, wise-woman or impostor, you may be sure she is sharp, and good at that mental arithmetic known as 'putting two and two together.' It is not likely she has imparted that gift to the Daylight Villa domestic, nor is that young personage very likely to know me on her own account, yet ——"

"Oh, leaving the letter is simple enough," interrupted Evelyn, impatiently. "The rub is, how are we to get an answer?"

A smile, suppressed instantly, crossed Philip Connell's lips. "Listen, Miss Agate," said he. "You have undertaken to be good enough to write this momentous epistle: how do you mean to word it?"

"Will it matter how? Perhaps you can tell me?"

"Well, you might say that a small party, about to visit the Cave at —let us say—eleven o'clock this morning, wish to meet her there. There will be nothing in that to let her guess, as Louisa says, that we are Coltburn people. And say that if she can come, she is requested to put a green book outside the red blind of her parlour window, and that will be understood as a sign of assent. If she cannot come, let her put a white paper."

"But may she not see you watching, Philip?" interrupted Louisa.

"No, my clever sister, she may not, and will not; for I can see those windows from the railway platform and the railway waiting room, and in neither of these places can I be seen from the windows of Daylight Villa."

"I think it's a capital plan," said Evelyn, "and I'm sure I can't think of any other. You see we not only give her no clue as to our identity, but even in a slight, unsuspicious kind of way, we mislead her a little."

"I'm not sure that that is quite fair," hesitated Louisa; which caused the other two to laugh heartily. And she sat down to write the note.

Philip took it from her, and went out quickly, passing Frank in the hall: in truth, there was little time to lose. He did not tell Frank where he was going, nor had Frank been asked to join the party to the Cave The tacit consent by which he had been left out, along with Alice Cleare, struck Philip as curious.

Philip was not long in reaching shabby Daylight Villa. Thrusting his missive into a grimy hand, stretched from behind the door to receive it, in answer to his knock, he started off for his coign of vantage in the railway station. So far he had succeeded beyond his hopes: he had been seen by nobody—certainly not by the owner of the grimy hand. The morning was lovely and exhilarating,—as bright and clear as a morning in smoke-canopied Coltburn could be; much more bright than Philip himself; for, now that he had fairly entered on the treason, he somehow did not like it.

Why was Frank left out? It was an accident, he supposed; and perhaps it would not have been the right thing to call him away from Mrs. Raven on the first morning of her visit. Yet Philip felt vexed on his own score, and antagonistic to Evelyn Agate. Forgetting that he had himself offered his services, he wondered why she need have chosen him as an ally. Next he began to doubt whether he had done right to sanction Louisa's tacit disobedience to what they both knew must be the will of their father and mother.

Altogether, Philip Connell, as he watched and waited, was not best pleased with himself. He half hoped the assenting sign would not appear in the dingy red-draped window.

Suddenly the dusky curtain stirred, and a book with a green cover was thrust into the middle pane.

Philip started home at the top of his speed. It was part of the plan that they must reach the Cave before the sorceress did, that she might not see they arrived together, or from what quarter they came. Besides, the latter part of the road was straight and lonely, and it would be a ridiculous situation for them all—she and they—to be toiling along in the same direction, within each other's ken.

He found both of the girls in the parlour, ready dressed and waiting for him—Louisa looking rather self-conscious and downcast, but Evelyn chatting suavely with Mrs. Connell over the legend and the natural curiosities of the Cave.

"It is delightful that we have found this pleasant way of relieving you of our tiresome presence," she said, laughing. "We know that you and dear Mrs. Raven and her son must have a vast deal to say to one another, and be longing for a quiet hour together."

Neither Mrs. Connell nor Frank responded to this pretty speech. Evelyn kissed Mrs. Connell as she passed out.

That lady's self-opinion was sinking to zero. For must it not be sheer hard-heartedness which made her give her cheek an involuntary rub after Evelyn's salute?

"To think that I should grudge a homeless girl kissing me!" she thought, silently, "a girl who has never had a mother of her own to kiss. But I don't like her; no, I do not. Why do I not? Is it because she is Mrs. Raven's companion? and that I don't like Mrs. Raven? Nonsense! It is something in the girl herself. When she is glib and forward it offends me; and when she does what seems

right and nice, I almost think I hate her. Is this Miss Agate a great favourite of yours, Frank?" added Mrs. Connell aloud.

"I do not know much of her," replied Frank. "I don't like her as I like the elder Miss Agate—the lady in whose house I met her. But then *she* is one of hundreds." If he had not seen Alice Cleare, it is probable he would have said "of thousands."

"I am not attracted to this girl, I confess," said Mrs. Connell. "To tell the frank truth, there's something in her which repels me. But she seems to suit your mother perfectly. Mrs. Raven has been praising her to me this morning."

Meanwhile the walking party had got far on their road. It was not a particularly attractive road, though it opened from the west end of the town, farthest from the mills and the foundries. It might once have had a gentle, pastoral beauty—the loveliness of fresh hedge-rows, fertile acres, and blooming gardens. But these mild charms yield only too readily to the inroads of smoke, brick-making, and a rough, shifting population. Here and there a heavy-eaved cottage, with a few sturdy shrubs haggardly enduring their hard conditions, remained to tell of what had been; but most of the houses were poor, small villas of the second-rate sort, inhabited by people who find a slippery ground between the "working classes" and the "shabby genteel." Nor did beauty increase when the last dwelling was passed.

At last the group reached the moor—a wild, flat waste, on which it seemed improbable that anything so romantic as a cave could exist. The merry-makers of the past summer had left desolation behind them in the shape of some black patches of burned underwood, but there were still masses of bracken, dying down in ruddy gold. And here and there, among the bushes, might be seen a grey boulder, revealing the more picturesque possibilities of the soil. A foot-path, striking off from the high road, led to the Cave. The moor was not so flat as it seemed in its treeless desolation; and they were presently on a slight upland, from which, looking round, they could realise their utter solitude. Not another living creature was in sight.

"We shall see this woman as she comes along," spoke Evelyn.

"Scarcely," returned Philip. "Nearer the Cave the way dips. It lies quite in a hollow: I have sometimes thought it should be called the Burrow."

They went on again, rather silently. Louisa was neither easy nor happy; and Philip still felt out of tune. As for Evelyn, she was meditating upon the approaching business. Must these two, her companions, hear all the wise woman might say to her? She did not want that. The more she heard of what she was secretly longing for, the better food would it no doubt be for Philip's ridicule. And yet, when she was their guest—when this morning's expedition could not have been made without their help—above all, when she was by no means unwilling to hear what should be said to *them*, it

would be singularly ungracious, if not impossible, to seek for herself special secrecy. Possibly some way might be found out of the difficulty?

At last the Cave was reached. It was a dismal enough spot; quite in keeping with the dreary old story of sin and woe which had given it an individuality above that possessed by the many similar and scarcely more insignificant natural hiding-places that might be found on that desolate heath. The ground around the Cave was trodden bare and hard, and reckless hands had been tearing at the hardy vegetation which nature had thrown over the rude lines of its arch.

"It is very like a London cellar," exclaimed matter-of-fact Philip, stooping to creep in.

The girls followed him, daintily holding up their skirts. They seemed to make quite a crowd in the little place; it was so very small. "Not much room here for the witch," went on Philip.

"She can hold her interview with each of us separately, and the other two can wait outside," said Evelyn, eagerly. If she had to sacrifice hearing the talk to Philip and Louisa, why she must. Of one thing Evelyn felt certain—that she could trust Louisa at least to tell her the whole truth. "She is just the girl that could not keep it to herself," was her disparaging reflection.

"I will not be left with the woman alone," cried out Louisa, in a panic.

Evelyn laughed. "Then I will stay with you, dear," she said: "and your brother can wait outside until you join him. *I* do not fear being left alone with her."

Philip was studying the initials with which the stony inside walls of the little den were covered, as well as he could see for the obscurity. "What a small sense of congruity most people seem to have," he remarked. "Fancy lovers bracketing their names in a place that bears such a tradition as this: a story of perjured love and deadly sin!"

"Oh, they don't think about that," was Evelyn's jaunty comment.

"My father has often said he wished the place could be destroyed," Philip went on, feeling an irresistible impulse to say things with which he knew Evelyn would have no sympathy. "It has no natural beauty, and it has an evil association. He really believes there might have been a perceptible difference in Coltburn if the holiday pilgrimages of its population could have been made to some great man's birth-place or some good man's grave instead of to——this!" And he kicked the stubborn wall as if he would like to shake it to its foundation.

"Don't do that while I am inside, please," cried Evelyn.

As she spoke, the little light which penetrated to the interior was darkened; and the opening to the Cave was nearly filled up by the form of a tall woman.

The Oriental Mystery had arrived.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### IN THE CAVE.

THE Oriental Mystery had arrived. And they had not seen her until she was in their very midst; a fact for which not one of them could ever account.

Both the young ladies started, not excepting Evelyn, and Louisa turned white.

"Are you all here?" asked the new comer, in a cold, hard voice, without any attempt at greeting.

"We are, madam," assented Philip, who retained all his easy equanimity. "It is very good of you to be so obliging and so punctual."

She only acknowledged his words by a slight inclination of the head. She had moved within the arched entrance, and she halted there, standing to face them with her back to the light, so that she could see their faces fully, while her own remained in shadow.

"I am quite ready," she said. "There is no reason for any delay. People must not think I court it for any reasons of my own. The time I can spare is brief."

Louisa had laid hold of Evelyn as if for protection. In truth she felt more agitated than the occasion called for.

"With which of us will you speak first, madam?" asked Philip, by way of commencement.

"What can that matter to me? You should have settled that among yourselves," said the woman, with some reproach in her dull, monotonous voice.

"But we want a little information," Philip said, giving to his manner that suave courteousness with which he usually stormed the hearts of elderly ladies. "Do you remain conscious while you speak with your visitors? I know some clairvoyantes do not."

"That depends entirely upon circumstances," she replied. "Sometimes I do, sometimes I do not. While my eyes are open I am conscious, when they close my bodily sense has passed away."

"And do you speak to us of your own spontaneous will, madam? Or do you require that we put questions to you?"

"That also depends on circumstances," she repeated, with an impatient wave of her hand, as if anxious to get to business. "If there be no reason otherwise, it is best that I speak first, and that your questions follow."

The little party whispered a word or two among themselves as to who should first stand forward. The place was certainly uncomfortably full, as they had said it would be, and its atmosphere was damp and heavy. Louisa's courage was evidently ebbing fast, so they told her she had better take the first turn, Evelyn remaining with her.

Then Evelyn and Philip could take their turns each alone, so that the other might keep Miss Connell company outside.

Philip went out, brushing the skirts of the Oriental Mystery as he passed by her; and, when outside, he felt how grateful were the fresh air and the common daylight. He had thrown himself into the scheme for fun's sake; but, now he had entered into it, he did not find it fun at all, rather the contrary. In fact, an uncomfortable feeling lay upon Philip, which he could not at all account for. Pacing up and down outside the Cave, he wished the Sibyl would be quick over her work, and have done with it.

The Sibyl apparently intended to lose no time. At the side of the entrance a rough stone, forming a seat, projected from the wall. The woman sat down upon it at once. Her face there was in deeper shade than before, while the young ladies, facing her still, stood in the light, Louisa a little forward.

"You have a wish in your heart," she began to Louisa, not touching her hand, or going through any of the ordinary pantomime of sorcery. "You have had a happy life. I see its line behind you, bright and clear. Is that so?"

"Oh, yes."

"But here—quite near—hardly passed—I see a seashore, and you walking on it—not alone. There has mingled with your line of life another, and his line of life looks dark and stormy. His name begins with the letter L. In his other name there is an O, but it does not begin it. Is that true?"

"It may be," faltered Louisa.

"I cannot see your future clearly," said the sorceress. "As far as it belongs to yourself only, it is calm and tranquil. There is a tie between you and somebody that is broken. I have seen him lately, I think: somebody who has a happy life, too. I cannot distinctly remember."

Evelyn and Louisa exchanged a glance. They knew Percy must be meant. Louisa was no longer confidential with him as of yore.

"But that other life that has crossed yours—there is no calmness there! I hear a sound as of a nation shouting. I see crowds running and seizing newspapers and eagerly reading them ——"

"Are they joyous or angry crowds?" interrupted Louisa, faintly.

The woman paused. "I think they are glad," she said, and paused.

"But though you can see all this," observed Evelyn, taking advantage of the pause to speak, "yet you cannot say confidently that this young lady's life and that other life will mingle in the future."

The Sibyl turned her face towards the speaker. In the gloom, Evelyn could see that her eyes were firmly shut now.

"No," she answered. "You know your vision has its limits; so has mine—though it reaches farther than ordinary sight."

"Will it be well if they do mingle?" pursued Evelyn.

"Let your friend ask her questions herself," rebuked the woman, sternly.

"Will it be well—well for us both?" whispered Louisa.

"Things must go very well before that life and yours can mingle," came the chilling answer, in which Louisa fancied there lay a sound as of hope mocked at. "Do not wish for it too much. Hearts may ache in purple and ermine. Have you anything else to ask me?"

"Can you tell me something about my present life?" said Louisa. Her heart rebelled against the tone of these foreshadowings, and she would have been thankful that this strange woman should prove herself to be only an impostor, hazarding guesses.

"There are strangers about you," said the woman slowly, knitting her brows. "People are sojourning in your home who do not live there. This is but a stranger by your side now; not any old friend; you saw her for the first time but lately—a day or so ago. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"There is another, too, an elder lady. She speaks in a low, quiet voice, and there's a troubled look at times in her face and eyes. Her secrets are her own, and they are dangerous ones. Next, there is a young man, and"—she paused here—"I see that young man distinctly."

"Can you describe him?" asked Evelyn, with almost feverish eagerness, willing, perhaps, to test her further.

"He is tall," she said in answer, "and his hair is brown, with gold dust in it. He has clear, darkish eyes; I think they are grey. He does not speak much just now. He is sad at heart. I should like to see him, too. I could show him why he is sad, though he has never disclosed the reason to living mortal: and I could perchance show him more than that. Tell him I say this," she continued, after a moment's stillness. "Tell him to come to me."

"Does he know that we are here?" inquired Evelyn.

The woman paused again. "I think not," she answered, with considerable hesitation.

"Can you foresee whether he will come to you, or not, if we deliver him your message?" Evelyn proceeded: and the woman appeared not to like the tone—perhaps not the questions.

"I hope he will come—for his own good," was the cold reply, and she moved her face somewhat restlessly. "No more yet. Am I now being consulted by you—or by the young lady who spoke to me first?"

"Have you quite finished?" whispered Evelyn to Louisa. "You look pale: you will be better for some fresh air."

"I should like to ask one question more," said Louisa to the fortune-teller: "it is about—that other life you speak of. Is not it, too, very sad? Could you show it, too, how to be happy?"

The woman shook her head slowly. "Yes, it is sad now," she answered. "As to the future —— The eagle loves the storm, and

the lion scents after blood : they do not care for sunshine and clover, or for what ordinary people may count as happiness : they rejoice in turbulence. Let the linnet and the lamb beware how they mate with such."

"Your face is so white, dear," urged Evelyn. "I am growing quite alarmed for you."

"It is needless," gasped Louisa ; "I have finished now."

She passed out as she spoke, groping almost blindly, and nearly stumbled over a stone. Philip, outside, caught her hand ; he stared at her white face.

"What, in the name of wonder, has she told you?" he asked. "You look as if the oracle had been of coffins and skulls, death watches and midnight phantoms."

"She has told me nothing horrible," said Louisa. "And yet —there seems something in it terrible to think of! She spoke correctly of our home, and ourselves, and our guests. What can have revealed it all to her? She actually described our cousin Frank—and she wants to see him ! She says she can speak to him about something which he never mentioned to anybody in the world, and that it will be for his good."

"So-ho !" whistled Philip, catching an idea, and believing he saw "method in the seer's madness." Had this innocent-looking cousin of his, secrets of his own? If so, they might perhaps account for much in his conduct which had seemed so unaccountable. In the human interest of this matter, Philip, for a moment, forgot its weird surrounding. But he presently wondered how, if there were such secrets, this woman could have found them out. Fancies chased each other rapidly through his brain. Could she be an adventuress, dodging Frank, and preying upon some old peccadillo? But that suggestion had to be renounced in a moment. Her coming to Coltburn had been publicly advertised in the local papers actually before he and Frank had put in their appearance there. Louisa said a little more, which only seemed further to perplex him. But the mysteriousness of it all—that which frightened Louisa and fascinated Evelyn—only irritated Philip.

"I would give a golden guinea not to have been mixed up in the affair," was his inward reflection. "I only encouraged it for a moment's fun ; and that I might study Mademoiselle Evelyn in a new light : and now she has put me right out of court, and I've got worse than nothing for my pains."

Meanwhile, the second colloquy had commenced inside the Cave, the woman speaking first. "Stand quite opposite me," said she, in a commanding tone. "I know what you want to ask."

Evelyn obeyed. Her eyes were growing accustomed to the dim light, and she could discern, though indefinitely, the large, strongly-marked features and bushy eyebrows of the Mystery's face.

"There is darkness," the woman began, in a slow, inert tone. "On

the darkness I see some signs. I see a figure 4 and a big moon, like a harvest moon. Can you understand that?"

"I think so," said Evelyn, involuntarily trembling. She remembered her birth-date, in the harvest month—September.

"The scene is ever shifting," the woman went on; "but in it there is always a little baby—a girl-child. Nobody cares much for it. It is never at home. It was not born in any of the places where I see it. It is—I think—yes, it is yourself."

Evelyn Agate bent forward in her eagerness. "Where was the child born?" she asked breathlessly.

"I see a young mother on a couch watched by an elder woman," the speaker went on evenly, as if she had not noticed the interruption. "I only see the couch. The mother knows that her child is to be taken from her. But she is sleeping when it really goes. Her love goes after it. I see its line behind you. That mother and child will meet again—if they have not already met."

"Do you mean to say I have seen my own mother?" burst forth Evelyn.

"I am not sure," came the slow answer. "It may be. I only see knots on that line of love, and that means something between you and her."

"Can you see her?—What is she like?—Is she a lady?" Evelyn asked impetuously, thrown quite out of her usual composure.

"She is very pale, as I see her: I do not see her distinctly," replied the Sibyl, moving her face in distress as if she wished to open, and could not, her closed eyelids. "Your childhood and youth have not been unhappy. Strangers have befriended you—cared for you."

"And those strangers have no idea who I am?" remarked Evelyn, in a questioning tone. For she had allowed herself at times to doubt whether Gertrude Agate's assertion of entire ignorance was quite sincere. The generosity she had shown to the nameless foundling was utterly incomprehensible to Evelyn.

"They have not the faintest idea," rapidly replied the woman. "I see the years pass on and on," she continued. "I see you then go from that home of early adoption to a great house: it seems to be recently. You feel quite at home there—as if you had been born to live in such places. Perhaps that is so."

"Shall I ever have such a house for my own?" whispered Evelyn.

"Yes," said the Sybil, with sudden energy. "Yes, if you marry one whom you have seen but lately, quite lately. A young man—tall and fair. He is in the same house with you now. You do not think he cares for you. Perhaps he does not. But he will care. When he approaches you with attention, smile on him. If his wooing seem harsh and cold, never mind. You must marry him. He is your Fate.—Be still an instant, or you will interrupt the vision. —Yes: your Fate. I see the life-line between you. If it draw closer, you have wealth, and rank, and luxury. If it does not,

there is for you nothing but servitude and dependence to the end of your days."

"And for him?" murmured Evelyn, with a beating heart.

"It will not matter much to him," the other answered, coldly.

"When your eyes shall be open," whispered Evelyn, "can you read the palm of my hand?"

The woman laughed. "I can read it with my eyes shut," she said. "It is a smooth hand without many lines. But it has one strange sign: it is the mark of an event which shall change the whole current of your life. Beware of it. Beware of being swayed by stray impulses of your fancy. Beware of strangers."

"Can you see what that event is?"

"I cannot."

"Can you give me any test by which I may know that I can trust your wonderful power?" faltered Evelyn.

"Test!" echoed the woman, a shade of anger in her voice. "Is not my knowledge of your mysterious birth and infancy quite enough? What will satisfy you?"

"Tell me something about my old home in London," pleaded Evelyn. "Something that my own past experience can verify."

The witch pressed her left hand rapidly on her heavy eyelids, and as rapidly withdrew it. "Eugh!" she said with a shiver, "I see a man there who was mad once. I hear the shrieks he gave. And there was a woman who died. Nothing further of that is revealed to me—it is quite dark. You were—yes—I think I am right—you were a very young baby at the time, but you seem not to have been yet in the house. Is that true?" she broke off. "Does that content you?"

"It is true," said Evelyn, a chill shudder creeping through her own frame. "I am satisfied that you know what you speak of—that these things have been revealed to you. But you have told me nothing about my father," she added quite humbly.

"Not much about him is given me to tell," quietly avowed the woman. "When I search for your father in the vision, I get confused. I see but green lanes and wide fields. And—yes—wait—there are two men following each other; one looks older than the other, and whether they are in the flesh still or not, I cannot discern. The elder man wears a long cloak, and where he walks it seems always moonlight."

"Does that mean that he is dead?" hazarded Evelyn.

There was no reply. The woman wore an anxious look, and slightly moved from side to side as if seeking for something. "I can do no more for you to-day," she said, presently. "Things elude me. The vision concerning you is departing."

Evelyn, disappointed, waited a minute or two, but the mysterious woman remained perfectly still: all was evidently over. "I will send in the gentleman now," she said, passing out of the Cave.

The brother and sister were seated side by side on a mound. Philip obeyed Evelyn's call with a grimace of contempt and distaste.

"What has she said to you?" asked Louisa eagerly, as Evelyn took Mr. Connell's vacated place.

"Oh, the ordinary farrago," returned Evelyn, with well-assumed indifference. "She has promised me a rich husband."

"But I'm sure she is not a common fortune-teller," urged Louisa; "or an impostor either. Think of the things she told me—think of the private matters she knows about."

"Oh, she has told me some facts that I cannot understand how she became possessed of," admitted Evelyn, coldly. She felt that to disclose the advice she had received, having rapidly made up her mind to follow it, would be as bad policy as to show one's cards when playing at whist. "They were facts about my own childhood, and my home in London, Miss Louisa," she carelessly said aloud, and would have dropped the conversation. Evelyn did not know how much or how little of her history might be known to any of the Connells, Philip excepted.

"And to think," exclaimed Louisa, "of her describing Frank Raven!—and of her wanting to see him! What can it be that she has to tell him?—what is it that he knows and she knows, and that nobody else in the wide world knows?" Louisa was running on in excitement, when both the girls started up with an exclamation. Philip had emerged from the Cave, a strange smile on his face.

"I have not been so fortunate as you were, young ladies," he said, drily. "Sit still, please, and make room for me beside you. Our mysterious friend wishes us to wait here, until she has gained a fair start of us on the way back to the town. She does not care to follow our steps, she says, lest it might be thought she took the opportunity to track out where we live, or any other information concerning us: which might tend to throw doubt on her revelations should any more of our circle choose to consult her."

"Now I should never have thought of that precaution myself," admitted poor Louisa. "Tell us what she said to you, Philip?"

"Hush! It will keep until she is fairly out of the way," he answered. Nor did their strange acquaintance try their patience long. Almost as Philip spoke, she came out of the Cave, and passed close by them; but without a word. They sat silently watching her as she moved rapidly away. She was a sufficiently commonplace figure. Anybody, meeting her on the moor, would have set her down, as a substantial tradesman's wife, or an upper servant from some of the big houses. She wore a brown stuff dress, a figured shawl, and a close bonnet with a bunch of artificial flowers. Only, her face was screened by a thick gauze veil, such as is seldom worn, without some special infirmity or reason for secrecy.

"She is not altogether one's ideal of a witch—is she?" remarked Philip.

"And now, Philip: let us hear what she told you?" pleaded Louisa.

"She told me—nothing!" answered Philip. "She told me I did not live here—but in a great city, among books and papers. She told me that I shall never be very rich nor very poor, and that I have a few debts to the bad, which I shall discharge in good time. She told me that I was in love with somebody, whom—as it happens—I do not even like. She added that this young lady will never marry me; which I am sure is quite true, for the best of all reasons—that she will never be asked to."

Evelyn looked up. "Perhaps the grapes are sour, Mr. Connell?"—and there was a touch of acidity in her tone and smile.

"Perhaps they are *not*," he rejoined, letting his honest eyes rest on hers for a moment. "Well, that comprises my fortune—and it is not much."

"Much! it's nothing," cried Louisa. "It seems as though she had done best with me. Her knowledge about things—about our visitors at home, was certainly remarkable."

"Daylight Villa overlooks the railway station?" interposed Philip. "She may have seen our visitors arrive. It may be one of the duties of her profession to watch the trains go in and out."

"This morning, you yourself said that the platform could not be seen from the villa, Philip. And if it could; if she saw you and Frank arrive a day or two ago, and Aunt Raven and Miss Agate yesterday, how would that serve her? It would not tell her that Frank is quiet and sad, or show her the colour of his eyes; or that Mrs. Raven is pale and quiet and goes about with a troubled look in her face, and has ——"

"Has what?" cried Philip; for his sister stopped abruptly.

"Secrets of her own, and they are dangerous ones," completed Louisa. "It was what the woman said, Philip. I did not mean to repeat it, but it slipped from me."

"Better not repeat it again, then," said Philip, with a glance at Evelyn, which told he meant to include her in the warning. "Fortune-tellers keep such sayings on hand. It is their stock-in-trade."

"She connected me with Percy," went on Louisa; "as good as said I was his sister. How could she know that? She never saw me in her life before: and I'm sure she could not see much of me in the Cave, it was too dark. I could not see her a bit; I shouldn't know her face again."

"She took care to sit with her back to the light," remarked Philip. "However, there was no other seat."

"She told me the initial letters of a name ——"

"Wonderful woman!" interjected the young barrister.

"I don't think you need scoff at it, Philip!" retorted his sister. "If she told you nothing about yourself, I expect it was because there's nothing to tell."

"She told you the initial letter, or letters, of the name she connected with your own, Miss Connell," put in Evelyn, with much apparent innocence. "It was ——"

"Halloa! what's that?" struck in Philip. "A name connected with Louisa's. Why ever was this, the greatest wonder of all, kept so long in the background?"

"Oh, you must expect these people to talk a good bit of nonsense; you have just said so yourself, Philip," was Louisa's quiet answer, given in confusion. "It would be silly to regard all they say. The curious part is, how they manage to get hold of any facts at all."

"And what are the facts in this case?" questioned Philip of his sister, noting, with surprise, the burning blushes on her face.

"She only said that at the seaside we made a friend with an L in his name," Louisa replied, her face growing more aflame as she was obliged to answer.

"That must have been Learli! It was he you met at Sandgate."

"And as we know his deep interest in politics," continued Louisa quickly, "it seemed very singular she should mention shouting crowds —and heaps of newspapers—and all that, in connection with Marco's name."

Evelyn gave a short, light laugh. This was all Louisa cared to tell her brother; and she looked at Miss Agate with imploring eyes. Evelyn returned the gaze significantly, and grew grave again. It might be policy to keep Miss Connell's secret—at any rate for the present.

"It is odd," said Philip, "that neither to Percy yesterday, nor to any of us to-day, Madame la Sorcière, when boasting of her extensive acquaintance with the inmates of our house, made not the least allusion to Alice Cleare."

"And did she not?" returned Evelyn, questioningly. "I thought she might have been the mysterious young lady whom Mr. Philip Connell is to find so adamantine."

Philip fired; the natural antagonism between himself and this girl was cropping up. He hated her satirical tone; he resented her making believe to think he had spoken slightingly of the little governess; indeed, he disliked her bringing Alice into such a light at all. But, angry though he felt, he subdued it instantly, and kept his coolness.

"I have only known Miss Cleare for two or three days," he said carelessly. "An impostor, trying to make an effect, would naturally bring forward one of my older acquaintances—people met in London, for example. Still, I wonder Miss Cleare was not alluded to. Even Mrs. Raven was."

"She didn't mention the servants, either," said Evelyn, pointedly. "I suppose she takes that kind of people as not counting in a house."

It exasperated Philip.

"Oh well—yes—ah, of course you are a visitor while you are with us—yes, to be sure," Philip cried, thoroughly on edge, and, for once, quite unable to hold back his retort or soften it into repartee.

"So you really think she is only an impostor?" Louisa interposed, noting, but not quite understanding, the suppressed anger in her brother's voice, and willing to efface it. Among her younger brothers and sisters she had always been in the habit of saying she did not know who was in the right, but she did know who was making a noise; and on that individual her mild punishments would fall. "Philip, do you think we shall get Frank to visit her?"

"If you want to do that," said Philip, "you will have to tell him we have been here to-day."

"I don't see that it follows, as a matter of absolute necessity," dissented Evelyn.

"What should you think, Philip, if she could really tell him something he has never mentioned to anybody? Would you still deem her an impostor?" urged Louisa.

"I shall reserve my judgment until the case comes before me," laughed Philip, recovering his usual good humour. "And now, as that learned lady has betaken herself to a safe distance, we may as well be walking homewards."

And they returned to Coltburn in nearly unbroken silence, each one absorbed in private thought.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A MIDNIGHT CRY.

When the party reached home, Evelyn Agate answered all inquiries as to her enjoyment of the expedition and her interest in the Cave with great readiness and fluency. Mrs. Raven remarked mildly that "she, too, must go and see this wonderful place;" upon which Mrs. Connell said that they might take a drive there some afternoon, though really there was not much to see.

Louisa Connell envied her visitor's coolness. It did not occur to her, as it did to Philip, that a person with such perfect powers for misleading and concealing, and so ready a will to exercise them, might be a dangerous person, never fully to be trusted. Not that Philip took a very high moral view of the matter. Evelyn was what she was, and it was her own affair.

"She has kept them all off our track this time," he thought, "and she will keep me off some other track on some future occasion."

And then he half wished that, by some turn of circumstances not quite inconsistent with what he called "honour"—such, for instance, as an apparently unguarded slip of the tongue—he could let Mrs. Raven and his parents know what had been the true motive and end

of that morning's ramble, and how thoroughly this girl could hoodwink them and everybody.

Everybody? No. As he looked down the table (for they were sitting at the mid-day meal), he caught Alice Cleare's eye. It had a conscious light in it which revealed tales. Could Louisa have told her anything? He felt sure she would not do so. Besides, there had been no opportunity for private conversation since they returned from the moors.

"She knows as well as possible that we have interviewed the Mystery," quoth Philip to himself. "Miss Cleare must be a witch on her own account!"

He wondered whether she would ask any question or drop any hint. But she did not. She went out with her pupils in the afternoon; and later, when the tea was over, and the children were in bed, she did not, as usual, join the circle in the drawing-room. Louisa, too, withdrew to her own chamber.

The party seemed dull; conversation flagged. At length Evelyn proposed to play a duet with Philip, who was a fair musician. Perhaps she wished to conciliate one of whom she felt somewhat afraid. Philip complied with gracious suavity, and they went off to the piano at the other end of the room—which left Mr. and Mrs. Connell, Mrs. Raven and Frank together. Percy was busy at a remote table with a mechanical drawing.

"I think you are fortunate in your governess, sister," observed the lady of Ravenscourt. She often called Mrs. Connell by that title, thereby jarring that good woman's sensibilities from head to foot. "Miss Cleare never obtrudes herself—and how fond the children seem of her! Nor does she seem to be that check on family intercourse which governesses so often are."

"That is true," answered Mrs. Connell, thankful to take up any conversation quite safe from personal feeling. "Sometimes I have thought that all the trial is not on the side of the young ladies who evoke so much general sympathy. I have known governesses who always drew apart the moment visitors arrived, thereby purposely imparting a sense of their being lonely and neglected."

"Nobody would be that, with you," said Mrs. Raven, softly.

"And my wife and I have often despaired of getting a lady inmate for whom we should not have to exalt the tone of our own conversation," Mr. Connell observed, with a smile. "When Mrs. Connell was a novice, she used to be quite frightened at the learning of governesses, as set forth in some advertisements, and shrink at the thought of her own inferiority. We tried one, and found that to be accomplished is quite different from being cultivated; that an expert parser need not be an intelligent reader; and that one may be quite fluent concerning educational systems, yet seem to think that the human mind, when fairly set to work, has little else to grind except matters of dress and etiquette. I assure you it's true."

"My spirits fairly leaped up when I got Miss Cleare's answer to my advertisement," narrated Mrs. Connell. "Everything which she honestly told as her own disadvantages were all in her favour with me. Her father, though an Englishman, had been a professor in the poorest of Scotch universities. Her mother had been dead four or five years, and since then she had kept his house and taught her own two little sisters. They had somehow lost their very small private fortune; but by a great effort—I almost think with borrowed money—the only son was sent to Cambridge. Had he been able to complete his studies there, the family, it was hoped, might regain its lost prospects. But the professor himself died suddenly; and when the debts were paid there was scarcely a penny left for the children. So the young man had to leave college and take a situation as usher in a boys' school."

"And then she came straight to you?" said Mrs. Raven.

Mrs. Connell shook her head. "No," she answered. "She, too, got a situation in a boarding-school, where her little sisters could be with her—her services eking out the cost of their maintenance. And there they both died ——"

"Oh, how sad!" sighed Mrs. Raven. "*Both* the children?"

"Alice says the one little sister pined away after her parents, and the other died in an epidemic which carried off the governess's own daughter. She stayed in the school till it was given up. That was when she came to me."

"Well," said Mrs. Raven, "it is to be hoped her brother will prosper in the world, and that life will so grow brighter for her. Though I am sure she is happy here—as she ought to be."

"But her brother is dead, is he not?" spoke Frank, his voice low.

"Yes, I was about to say so," Mrs. Connell replied. "I happened to make some remark about him when she first came here, and she answered, very quietly, that he also was with God. I can't think why she had not mentioned that in her letters before she came. Hearing it thus, it so shocked me, that I could not say another word. And I fancied she must deem me cold and unkind."

"But—I don't think he was dead then—when she corresponded with you," hesitated Frank. "You have heard, Aunt Connell, how I met her, not knowing who she was, when she had lost her way that night at Ravenstoke."

"To be sure I have, Frank. She told us all about that directly she heard you were our relative."

"*I* have not heard of this," struck in Mrs. Raven. Her tone was acid. For a moment she was her old, cold, arrogant self; and Frank could fancy he was back in the Raven house ten years ago, arrested for some childish misdemeanour, and already prejudged and condemned.

"It was nothing, mother; it was quite a chance," he began, but Mrs. Raven interrupted him.

"*What* was a chance? Be so good as to explain it to me." And Frank explained with a burning face.

"It was on my last night at home: I dined, if you remember, with Mr. Toynbee. After leaving him I took a moonlight saunter through the lanes: it was a very bright night. Suddenly I met a young lady, who stopped to accost me—and I saw it was the same young lady I had seen earlier in the day in the road, not far from the White Hart. She asked me the way to the inn ——"

"*When* did she ask you?—which time?—be clear if you can, Frank," put in his mother.

"Oh, at night. I had only passed her in the day-time. She said she had been to Gerstowe, was later than she had thought to be, and had lost the path through being frightened by something: and so, I—I showed her the way to the White Hart. It was safer to do that than to direct her in that maze of green hedges. Besides, it was my own way home," concluded Frank, as if the matter required excuse, and in a sort of desperate haste to get it over, for the two players, having ceased their music, were turning round to listen now.

"Oh certainly you would not have done so had it been in a contrary direction," said the Rev. Mr. Connell, with a good-humoured laugh. "We quite understand that, Frank. Well?"

"Well, of course, I did not know her name then," Frank resumed. "I only heard that when I saw her here the other day. But she told me that evening she had to make her way on the morrow to a situation in the midland counties, and that her brother had just died in Gerstowe, at the school where he was tutor. She had been to see him, and had been with him at the last."

"Dear, dear, what a terrible ordeal she put herself through," cried Mrs. Connell, a mist in her own kind eyes. "I can understand why she did it, though. You remember, James, I was very urgent about her speedy coming, and she must have felt it was not her duty to risk the appointment."

"Do you not think she must have been rather hard-hearted to attempt to come at that time?" gratuitously put in Evelyn. "And very secretive to be able to do it?"

"As to that, I think we are all secretive in our own wills and ways," cried Philip, significantly, in answer. "The chief difference lies in this: do people have cause to think less of us, or more, when they find out our secrets!"

"And even that depends somewhat on the people, Philip," observed his father; "for the base will praise a man for cleverly concealing a crime, and would contemn him for not displaying a virtue."

Mrs. Connell had not spoken. Frank glanced across at her. Her head was bowed, the tears had gathered on her eyelashes. It was a pitiful tale. Poor Alice Cleare and her brother loved each other to

the end, and had not they gone together as far as they could? He had died doing his duty; she was persevering faithfully in hers.

But what of herself and her dead brother Henry?

Oh, ye who cry out in anguish as ye are rent asunder—ye know nothing of the mute agony of voluntary parting!

Mrs. Raven, detecting nothing of what was passing in people's minds, was the next to speak. "Frank," she said, "how had the young girl been frightened?"

"Thereby hangs a tale," said Frank, speaking lightly. "By the way, mother, I suppose you do not know of any neighbour of ours likely to wander abroad to frighten people in the moonlight ——"

"Don't be silly," interrupted Mrs. Raven.

"I am not silly; I am serious. A figure so shrouded in a long dark cloak that one cannot see who or what it is; whether old or young, man or woman, or ——" Frank stopped.

"Or what?" asked the minister.

"Or ghost, I was going to say, sir, but for the presence of ladies," continued Frank, with a laugh.

Mrs. Raven had turned deadly pale. She began to cough, holding her handkerchief up to hide her face. Evelyn Agate looked at Frank, and drew in her breath.

"What a queer description, child," said Mrs. Raven, recovering herself with a nervous titter. "Ghost, indeed!—what next? Where is this apparition to be seen, pray? I suppose you mean at Raven?"

"Yes," answered Frank, unconscious that the subject held special interest for anybody present. "It was a figure like this which had frightened Miss Cleare just before she met me. And when she told me of it I remembered that the servants always shrink from going through the warren after dusk, fearing they may meet the ghost. Perhaps you don't know much about this, mother?"

Evelyn was listening with breathless interest. Mrs. Raven concealed her agitation under a guise of severity and indifference. "Such tales were not likely to find much encouragement from me," she said coldly.

"But it would be a curious confirmation of them, if a stranger, who knew nothing of their existence, saw something corresponding to the account the servants give. Don't you perceive that, mother?"

"Weakminded people are apt to clothe everything they cannot distinctly see with mystery," said Evelyn, "and however bright the moon was that night, moonlight is not daylight."

"Miss Cleare never hinted at its being anything supernatural," Frank retorted hotly, piqued by the girl's scoff at Alice.

"But surely you don't believe it was a ghost," cried Mr. Connell.

"Dear me, no, sir," answered Frank, surprised by the mere question.

"The warren is certainly a lonely and dismal place," remarked Mrs. Raven; "that is the way you went back to the village on the evening when I lost my purse, Miss Evelyn. No harm came to you. I suppose you saw nothing?" she added, with a forced laugh.

Evelyn lightly echoed it. "I passed nobody all the way between the Court gate and the village lane," she said, keeping truth to the letter while thoroughly false to its spirit. "If any ghost passed me, it put on its invisible cap, and I hope I did not frighten it."

"Well," said Mr. Connell, "it is quite refreshing to think that there is still a place in England where ghosts walk. We never hear of any about us—amid our railway stations and factories."

"Oh, we have always had them at Raven," laughed Frank: "apart from this figure —— of which I have heard whispers from time to time all through my boyhood. There was the ghost that was heard to dig the child's grave in the churchyard."

"What nonsense is this?" flashed Mrs. Raven, angrily.

"Did you never know of that? Oh, surely you must, mother! It was always especially interesting to me, because it was heard on the very night I was born."

"What was heard? And who heard it?" inquired his mother. "You seem to have an extraordinary collection of legends, Frank."

"It was Budd's brother, the sexton," said Frank. "I suppose nobody ever liked to tell you the story. It ran, that he was asleep in his cottage; by the churchyard, you know; when he suddenly woke with a start and a shiver,—and heard a sound as of a grave being dug, which——"

"Was surely rather familiar to his ears," interpolated Mr. Connell, with a smile.

"But which, nevertheless, made his blood run cold," Frank went on, forcibly imitating the impressive and mysterious manner of the rustic folk from whom he had got the tale.

"Did he get up, and go on search?" asked Philip.

"No," said Frank, "he only awoke Mrs. Budd."

"Just like a man!" laughed Mrs. Connell.

"And I hope she had sense to tell him to go to sleep again," said her husband.

"On the contrary," Frank narrated, "the good woman instantly supplied an excuse and a possible reason for the strange sound, which she heard as well as he. 'That's a phantom grave-digger, William, and I hope we shan't have sad news from the Court to-morrow,' she said to her husband. 'I got a hint to-night there was likely to be one more of the family before morning. Heaven send that there may not, rather, be one less!' It was, I say, the night I was born."

"One can understand, then, how it was you never heard anything about this," whispered Mrs. Connell aside to her sister-in-law.

"And what was the end of it?" asked the minister.

"The end of it was that they lay still and listened," said Frank, "and after the ghost had had time to dig a grave——"

"Of which matter the sexton, of course, was a good judge," said Mr. Connell, with assumed gravity.

"Aye," assented Frank, "an especially good judge, as you may guess from this concluding detail, which was never omitted from the story. That he said to his wife, as the sounds ceased: 'Maria, our lady herself up at the Court, is all right. It's the poor baby that's took. For that's only a child's grave that's been dug.'"

"See the beauty of having an expert for a witness!" cried Philip.

"Before breakfast, next morning," Frank went on, "the sexton went up to the Court to speak to his brother, our butler, good old Budd. He got Budd into the garden, and gave him the dreadful tidings, all downcast; when our Budd, who is a sensible man, had heard him out, he spoilt the point of his story, by telling him that the baby had come and was particularly alive and flourishing, and the mistress too. And the old sexton declares to this day, he can't make out why that phantom grave should have been dug."

"It must be hard to get a good ghost-story spoiled!" laughed the minister.

"To return to what we were talking of," said Frank: "Miss Cleare had not the faintest idea that what she saw was ghostly. She thought it only some person, prowling mysteriously, for no good end. Her account of it was distinct enough. It had passed her in a narrow lane, between a stile and a round shed —— which must have been Ash Lane. That which leads to Eldred Sloam's cottage, you know, mother."

At sound of that name, Mrs. Raven remembered her own intervention in that man's favour, and the mysterious reason she had had for it, and all that happened since. As she sat there, still and stately, she trembled in spite of herself.

"Eldred Sloam!" exclaimed Evelyn, who had been listening with deep attention, "Eldred Sloam! where have I heard that name? O, yes: it was the man you and I met at the Lodge-gates, Mrs. Raven, on the evening of our last walk to the village. And I remembered then, that I had heard you, Mr. Frank, speak of him once at Aunt Gertrude's."

"Frank could not tell you much good about Eldred Sloam?" exclaimed Mrs. Raven, frigid of manner, though her heart beat fast.

"I had remarked to him that Davies had given a bad character to some of the Raven people and called them black sheep," continued Evelyn. "Mr. Frank replied that Eldred Sloam was the blackest. Don't you recollect?" she added, rather impatiently turning to Frank, who seemed inclined to leave her to tell the story herself.

"I recollect it," put in Philip. "It was the night when Mary Davies slipped downstairs, and your Aunt Gertrude was inclined to blame you, mademoiselle, for having made her nervous."

"And pray, who is Mary Davies?" haughtily inquired Mrs. Raven. "And what was she nervous about?"

"Mary Davies," answered Evelyn and speaking with the sweetest deference, "is a many-years' servant in my London home. A faithful creature, I suppose, but troublesome. Because she attended upon me in my childhood, she thinks she has a right to love me as Aunt Gertrude does, and would have much liked to keep me at home for ever and a day. Stupid old thing!"

"And this Mary Davies, what can she know of Ravenstoke?" demanded Mrs. Raven again. The room seemed moving round her, but with a supreme effort she kept her presence of mind, feeling she might be within reach of some clue to matters that seemed to be ever eluding her.

"Simply nothing, madam," answered Evelyn. "When a girl she had lived in some village a few miles from it, and had visited Ravenstoke on one or two festive occasions of that period."

"Everybody one hears of seems to have visited Ravenstoke, or to know something about it," said Mrs. Raven, acidly. "I had no idea that such a tide of life could flow from so obscure a place."

"Ah, that's one of the mysteries of nature," observed Philip. "If I went and pitched my tent in the middle of the Great Desert, I should expect a Coltburn man to call on me next morning. I've often felt as if there must be a law of gravitation among ourselves, as well as in the spheres, which holds us in a certain orbit."

"Which means simply that no man can escape from himself and his past," suggested his father. "The paths of life are less diverged than we are apt to think them, Philip, and ourselves less free.—Yes, I suppose it is about time to say good night," he added, as Mrs. Raven rose, looking very weary.

"I am tired," she confessed. "Miss Agate, my dear, will you kindly look in my room as you go up, and see that things are put as I like them?"

"We all seem fairly tired out," cried Philip, as he shook hands with the young lady, "and I shall be glad to escape to the land of dreams. May yours be sweet, Miss Evelyn! I hope you won't be haunted by any ghosts from the Cave!"

"I don't believe in ghosts," retorted Evelyn, with a fine scorn. "I leave that to Miss Cleare. You were not *with* her when she saw this wonderful figure, were you, Mr. Raven?"

"No," said Frank briefly.

"Ah," nodded Evelyn. "I remember, Mr. Philip, that she did not contradict you when you said she believed in the ghosts that two people did not see at the same time. That is a convenient sort of ghost to imagine—or invent! Good-night."

As Evelyn closed the door, she left a silence behind her. Mrs. Connell was the first to break it.

"I do not think it need be wondered at if Alice Cleare felt a little nervous after such an evening as she had spent. She had come from her dead brother when Frank met her."

"She didn't seem nervous at all," said Frank. "I would have trusted her opinion about anything—sad as she was."

"I think real sorrows and trials save the nerves from being shaken by fancies," observed Mr. Connell.

Mrs. Raven looked at Frank earnestly. "This story troubles me," she said, clearing her throat. "I have heard of the foolish talk that obtains among the Ravenscourt servants concerning such a figure. When this tale reaches them, it will, of course, become a veritable ghost at once."

"Probably it was nothing more than some eccentric stranger lodging at an outlying farmhouse," observed Mr. Connell, who had put on a cloak for warmth. "An out-of-the-way figure seen at a weird time, or under some coincident circumstance, is very apt to be drawn into the region of the supernatural."

"But," insisted Frank, "Miss Cleare never for a moment imagined it to be a ghost; I feel quite certain of that. She only thought it to be someone, either man or woman, who might have come abroad disguised for some sinister purpose."

"Was not that an uncharitable judgment to form so hastily?" demanded Mrs. Raven. Like Evelyn, she had caught up an antipathy for this unknown girl, Alice Cleare: or, possibly, to the girl's honest, straightforward nature.

"Not at all, mother," said Frank, rather warmly. "But the word, sinister, was mine, not hers. None of us can help the impressions we receive. She knew she felt frightened: that was all."

Upon that they all separated. As Mr. and Mrs. Connell passed the door of Alice Cleare's room towards their own, a faint stream of light issuing from the keyhole showed that the governess had not yet retired to rest.

Mrs. Connell paused. "I think I must go in and speak a word to her," said that kindly lady. "I should like to, after what I have heard to-night about all that happened before she came here."

"Do so then, Millicent," assented the minister, cheerfully.

Mrs. Connell found Alice writing. The girl rose with an exclamation, and an apology that she had not noticed the lateness of the hour. Her little pupils, who shared her room, were sleeping soundly. Alice looked alarmed, and Mrs. Connell thought she must have startled her. But the anxious look lingered, and even deepened as the good woman put her hand kindly on the girl's shoulder, and paused for a moment.

"What you must have borne, my dear!" she said. "Frank has

been telling us of the great sorrow that had fallen upon you that past evening when he met you at Raven."

Alice gasped out, "Oh!" with a prolonged breath, and looked up. The scared expression had gone from her face. She had feared some question about the Cave expedition.

"How could you do what you did!" Mrs. Connell went on. "How brave you were! How you must have loved that brother!"

The girl was crying now. "Oh, thank you for saying that," she said. "I always fancied if people knew, they might think quite otherwise."

"Great love and great courage go together," cried Mrs. Connell. "Only it was so terribly hard that you should not see your brother laid at rest in his grave, after you had seen him die."

"It was hard," confessed Alice, quietly; "but, then, many things are hard." She was thinking that it would have been harder still to have left strangers to pay for his last needs and his lowly grave. Performing that duty had utterly emptied her purse. She had not even had a coin over to buy fresh mourning for herself: that which had been worn for her last sister had been made to serve. Now that she had received one instalment of salary from Mrs. Connell, she had begun the world again. Nobody suspected all this, for she had been silent.

Mrs. Connell asked some particulars, and the two sat and talked long together, unmindful of the lapse of time. Alice told how good her brother had been, and how clever, and narrated little incidents of their happy years in the bleak North town, and how thoughtful and kind he had been to his sisters in the first days of their orphanhood. The past, which, only pondered over in utter silence, had been growing like a strange dream, became once more vivid and real, and though Alice wept more than she had ever wept in the lonely vigils sometimes kept in her quiet room, she felt her tears refreshed her like the "growing weather" of spring. It was so refreshing to pour out this confidence. In the midst of it, the staircase clock struck midnight.

Mrs. Connell started up. "Now whatever will my husband think has become of me!"

She stole yet a moment to step softly to her children's bedside before she went away; while Alice Cleare turned to the window to take a parting look at the night.

As she opened the curtains, a silver stream of moonlight flooded the room. Mrs. Connell gently kissed her sleeping children, left them, and paused beside Alice.

The atmosphere of that neighbourhood was clearer by night than by day. The great old trees in the garden and the turf of the small lawn did not show the strangely shabby appearance which they did—to country eyes at least—by daylight. The two ladies stood, gazing out in silence.

Suddenly, something seemed to stir in the picture before them. There came a long shadow on the grass. Each felt the other give the involuntary movement of watching. From under the great trees, out upon the little clearing of the lawn, stepped a gliding figure.

A tall figure, with some dark covering on its head, and with its body draped from shoulders to ankles in a long black cloak.

Alice Cleare clutched Mrs. Connell's arm. She thought she had seen this figure once before; and a nameless, breathless terror began to steal over her.

The apparition—if it was one—came slowly across the grass towards the house. Suddenly, it paused and raised its head, as if to look at the windows; but the moon was behind it, and the face lay in deep shadow. But surely it was very white—and what was the deep red mark that showed beneath the ear? Did it see them, standing there? Somehow, indistinct as the face was, it did not seem fairly turned upon theirs. All at once it stretched forth its right arm, and held it high, and shook its clenched fist threateningly.

Suddenly the unseen eyes seemed to meet theirs. Did the figure start? Certainly, it turned and sped away through the shrubbery.

"I have seen that before—I think I have," gasped Alice, still clinging to Mrs. Connell, as they watched its retreat. "What can it be? What can it mean?"

"But where did you see it, child?"

"I saw that same figure—yes, I am sure it is the same—pass me in the Raven lanes on the night I met your nephew. It frightened me sadly: I don't know why: but I could not forget it. What can it mean, Mrs. Connell?"

But before she had finished whispering this, while they were yet clinging breathlessly together, and all else was as still as death, a piercing shriek rang out from somewhere in the house, awaking its echoes and its terrors.

*(To be continued.)*

# ON THE NIGHT OF THE STORM.

By Mary E. Penn.

## I.

"ONCE for all, Brigitta, I will not marry Count Baldassare! Rather would I take the veil, or die an old maid. If he has asked you to be his advocate you may give him that answer, with my compliments."

Having so expressed herself, the speaker turned from her companion, and crossed to the arched opening of the vaulted loggia in front of the house, where she stood, like a bright picture in a sombre frame, looking out over the rich Tuscan landscape.

The waning sunshine of a sultry September afternoon lay in long shafts of light across a broad fertile slope, covered with golden fields of maize and corn, grey olive woods, and vineyards where the grapes were ripening under the yellow leaves. All that sunny hillside, with its vines and fields, up to the ridge of stone-pines, dark against the sky, was her own; as well as the rich meadows by the stream, and the old grey farmhouse with its flat roof and open galleries, which had sheltered her people from time immemorial.

She, Teresa Guercino, was the last of the old stock—for the cousin who managed her house was no blood relation—and absolute mistress of herself and her possessions. A tall stately girl of one-and-twenty, with a skin which the sun had kissed; eyes dark as night and soft as velvet, under level brows; and full red lips, which told of a generous, but passionate and undisciplined nature. Her companion, a little shrivelled elderly woman, with a hooked nose and bead-like black eyes, in the dress of a well-to-do contadina, sat knitting within the loggia.

"Do you mean that?" she asked shrilly, looking up for a moment from her twinkling needles.

"I think you know that I generally mean what I say, cousin."

"I know that you are perverse enough to anger a saint," answered the cousin pettishly, as she changed the pins. "What have you against the man—tell me that?"

"Nothing—except that I detest him."

"Detest? pooh! a woman's hate is only love turned inside out, as the proverb says. It would all come straight after marriage. He is passionately fond of you; he is rich; he can give you a title——"

"A brand new one too, with the gloss upon it!" Teresa put in, with a slighting laugh. "It has only been in the family one lifetime. These Baldassari, whose alliance you think such an honour, are parvenus of yesterday, nothing more. We were masters here on our own land when they were little better than serfs."

"They have the best of it now, anyhow. Much of your land has passed to them, thanks to your father's mismanagement. If you married the count you would get it back," was the prompt suggestion. Teresa laughed.

"No; he would get what remains—and that he never shall! Say no more, Brigitta, unless you wish to quarrel with me. I will take your advice on any other subject, but I mean to choose my husband for myself."

"And a fine choice you will make," the housekeeper returned drily, as she rolled up her knitting and put it in her pocket. "Ah, you may look; I know what I know. Ahimé! 'tis a crooked world!" She rose as she spoke, and pushed back her chair with a grating sound that made her companion start.

"Santa Maria, what a noise!" the girl exclaimed impatiently; "you will wake little Angelo; he is asleep in the sala."

Brigitta, who was turning to enter the house, paused and looked at her. "So! you have got the steward's brat here again? Humph! Meraldi should be grateful to you. It is not every mistress who would put herself out of the way for her servant's child."

"Meraldi is no more my servant than you are," the girl retorted, with a heightened colour, "and you seem to forget that, like yourself, he is my relation ——"

"Your connection by marriage, no more," the housekeeper corrected quickly. "His late wife was your cousin ——"

"And my dearest friend. It would be strange indeed if I took no interest in poor Angela's only child."

"So that your tender interest in the child doesn't extend to the father, I have nothing more to say."

"And if it does?" Teresa rejoined, turning upon her suddenly, flushed and defiant. "Listen—you shall know my mind once for all. I will be Meraldi's wife if he asks me—if he does not, I will be no other man's."

"Then, mia bella, I fear you will 'coiffe Sainte Catherine,'" retorted Brigitta, with a series of little short dry nods. "Meraldi has no eyes or heart for anyone but his child."

Having launched this shaft, she trotted off into the house. Teresa stood for a moment, leaning against the stone pillar, then, taking up her broad Leghorn hat, she descended the steps that led from the southern loggia into the garden.

In times gone by, the building which was now a farmhouse had been a Carthusian monastery. Traces of faded frescoes still lingered on the walls of its great bare echoing rooms; the chapel was in ruins, and the cloisters had been converted into stables, but the garden remained very much as the old monks had left it—such a garden as Fra Angelico might have painted for a background to one of his sweet saintly pictures. It was in true Italian taste, at once formal and picturesque; green even in winter, with its ilex and arbutus,

laurel and cypress, and, from early spring to late autumn, a perfect paradise of flowers—roses, magnolias, oleanders, myrtles, camellias, and a hundred nameless blooms, all flourishing at their own sweet will.

A vine-grown wall enclosed it, low on the inner side, but high towards the road, which was on a different level. The house stood on the southern slope of a valley, through which a wilful little stream hurried over its rocky bed to join the river Serchio.

The summit of the opposite hillside was crowned by a grey mediæval tower, which was all that remained of a strong fortress that in feudal times had frowned upon the valley at its feet. The tower stood on Count Baldassare's land, which was divided from Teresa's by a rough low stone wall.

Lower down on the slope, gleaming white out of a sea of vines, was the cottage occupied by her farm-bailiff, Antonio Meraldi.

She leaned on the garden wall, under the shadow of a bignonia tree, looking, with a moody dissatisfied face, across the sunny hillside towards the steward's house.

She was standing thus, "half light, half shade," when the sound of a horse approaching made her look down towards the road. It was Count Baldassare. He was a slight, somewhat foppishly dressed young fellow of five-and-twenty, looking older than his years; with a thin, dark, mobile face, and restless glittering black eyes, that had a smouldering fire in them. His features were regular, but there was something vaguely repellent in their expression, even when he smiled, as he did now, looking up at her with uncovered head.

"I owe the saints a candle for this chance," he said. "It is almost a miracle to find you alone. May I come in?"

Without waiting for her permission, he dismounted, tied his horse to a ring in the wall, and ascended the steps to the garden gate, which she reluctantly opened to admit him.

"Excuse me for intruding," he began, looking at her with a curious mixture of admiration and defiance: "your face tells me that I am an unwelcome visitor. What would you, Teresa? The attraction that draws me here is stronger than my will."

"Your will must be a weak one, signor Conte," was her comment.

He glanced at her with a curious smile. "You think so? You do not know me. You will learn some day that no obstacles deter me from my purpose, and that what I covet I always win in the long run."

"Unless you happen to encounter a will as strong as your own," she answered, looking him full in the face for a moment, and then turning from his side.

"What—you are going?" he exclaimed. "Am I so hateful to you that you cannot endure my presence for five minutes? Have all my patience and devotion been thrown away!—Have you no heart, Teresa?"

"Yes," she answered quietly, "I have a heart—but it is beyond your reach."

He drew in his breath quickly. "Does that mean that it is given to another?" he demanded, with jealous suspicion.

She coloured, and turned from him without replying. He caught her wrist and detained her. His face was white, and there was a fierce gleam in his eyes that startled her.

"Who is it? tell me his name —— "

"Have you lost your senses?" she cried. "Let go my hand ——"

He paid no more heed than if she had not spoken.

"Perhaps I can guess," he continued, bending to look into her face. "I have heard it whispered that the handsome steward of San Giovanni could be master of the farm and its mistress if he chose, but —— "

She tore her hand from his grasp, crimsoning to the temples. "How dare you!" she panted, breathless with indignation.

"Ah, I see—it is true," he commented, with a bitter smile. "Your face speaks for you. So the proud heart that is 'beyond my reach' lies at your servant's feet? and he ——"

He broke off abruptly, glancing over his shoulder towards the road, whence there came the sound of a mellow baritone voice, singing a Tuscan "rispetto." The next moment the garden-gate opened and swung to, admitting the very person whose name had just been mentioned—Antonio Meraldi.

The steward was a strikingly handsome man, still in the prime of life, though not in his first youth; with an olive-tinted oval face, somewhat melancholy in repose, broad, calm, honest dark eyes, a tall lithe figure, and a small head well set on a pair of muscular shoulders. By the side of the young Count, with his foppish dress and neat little waxed moustache, he looked like a prince in disguise.

He glanced with a shade of surprise at Baldassare, but lifted his hat to him—a courtesy which was only acknowledged by an insolent stare—then turned to his young mistress.

"I am going up to the house, signorina, to fetch Angelo," he said, and was passing on, but she called him back.

"Stay for me; Signor Baldassare is going now."

"Pardon me," the latter interposed, "I have something more to say to you before I take my leave."

"I will not listen to another word," she flashed out angrily; "you shall not insult me twice."

Meraldi started. "What—you have been insulted?" he exclaimed, taking a step towards the visitor, with a dangerous glitter in his dark eyes.

Teresa hastily put herself between the two men. "Antonio, I forbid you to interfere."

"Then let this gentleman take himself out of my reach," he said significantly, pointing to the gate.

The young man looked him over with a sneering laugh, twisting his moustache with unsteady fingers. "At your bidding? Basta! not I. You are not master here yet, my good fellow, though it seems that your mistress would ——"

The sentence was never finished. Before he knew what the steward intended, he found himself seized in a grasp of iron, lifted over the low wall with as much ease as if he had been a child, and dropped neatly into the dusty road outside. Having executed this summary ejection, without the least appearance of heat or hurry, Meraldi leaned on the wall, looking down on him composedly.

"You might as well have gone through the gate, signor Conte," was his remark. The other turned and gave him a look of concentrated hatred that made Teresa shudder.

"You shall pay me for this," he panted, under his breath; "there will be a reckoning between us some day, and then you shall pay me with interest."

"You should not have interfered," were Teresa's first words when they were alone; "you have made him your enemy for life. He is dangerous. Did you notice the look he gave you just now?"

Antonio shrugged his shoulders. "He is more than half mad, I believe, at times. They say he has been drinking hard lately—keeps a secret store at the old tower. By the way, did you know he had taken to sleeping there lately?"

She stopped short in her walk and looked at him. "At the tower? why, it is a ruin!"

"The upper part is, but the basement is solid enough. Anyhow, it is a favourite haunt of his. I see him going past, up the hill-road, nearly every evening, between sundown and moon-rise."

Teresa shivered uncomfortably. "I wish you had not told me. I hate for him to be so near. I believe he has the evil eye."

"I dare say he would do me an ill turn if he could," pursued the steward, "though I hardly know how he would set about it. I have nothing to lose—except your friendship: and I hope he will never rob me of that," he added, laying his hand on hers for a moment.

Her face flushed and softened, she glanced up at him half wistfully, but meeting his frank, unembarrassed smile, looked away again.

"Of course his enmity will not make me less your friend," she answered carelessly, as she led the way into the house.

They passed through an open glass door into a cool spacious shadowy room, with antique furniture, and walls flecked with dim rich colours. Meraldi took off his hat and looked round, shaking back his thick dark hair with a gesture that was habitual to him.

"How pleasant it is here, after the heat and glare outside!"

"Sit down, and I will get you a cup of wine," she said, pushing a chair towards him.

"Excuse me—I must not stay. I only looked in to fetch Angelo. Is he better? he has been in my thoughts all day."

"He is asleep; come and look at him."

She preceded him to the upper end of the room, where there was an alcove, in which the abbot's chair of state once stood. It contained now a heavy carved couch, covered with faded amber damask, on which little Angelo—a pretty, fragile-looking boy of four or five years old—lay, fast asleep. Meraldi bent over the child, watching him with anxious tenderness, oblivious for the moment of his companion, who stood in the shadow behind.

"Angiol mio! He grows more like her every day," she heard him murmur; and she knew that he was thinking of his dead wife. The girl's heart contracted with a thrill of jealous pain; her face flushed and paled; her fingers nervously twisted the silver beads at her throat. Had he looked up then, he might have learnt a secret he was far from suspecting at present, but when he turned towards her the expression had passed away.

"It seems almost a pity to wake him," he whispered.

"You need not. Leave him here for to-night, and I will bring him back myself to-morrow evening."

"Will you? benissimo! It is a long time since you honoured me with a visit."

"I suppose you have almost finished reaping, on the slope?" she said, as she followed him to the door.

"We shall finish to-morrow I hope, if the weather holds up. It has been a glorious harvest, and the vintage promises finely. Everything prospers with you as usual."

"You have brought me luck," she said, with a faint smile.

He lifted his shoulders and laughed, somewhat ruefully, as he took up his sunburnt straw hat.

"Have I? then I have brought you what I never found myself, cara Padrona, or I should be my own master now, instead of your prime minister."

Teresa stood and watched him as he passed through the fragrant garden alleys.

"This must end, I cannot bear it," she muttered. "I shall get to despise myself, or to hate him. I must send him away, though it break my heart. Oh, I am a fool!"

She angrily dashed from her eyes the tears that had gathered in spite of her, and turned indoors.

## II.

THE shadows were lengthening on the following afternoon when Teresa, leading little Angelo by the hand, crossed the flat timber bridge over the stream, and passing through a little wood of ilex-trees whose twisted stems were bearded with long silvery moss, ascended the rough road which wound up the hillside. The reapers were

leaving work, and she met throngs of merry contadini coming down from the harvest fields; and clumsy carts laden with yellow sheaves, and drawn by great dove-coloured oxen, with mighty horns, and grand dark eyes.

As they turned a curve in the steep road, Meraldi's voice hailed them from above. He had seen them approaching, and came to meet them, waving his hat. Angelo bounded forwards, and was promptly swung up on to his father's shoulder.

"How good of you to come," was the latter's greeting, as he walked on at her side, holding the boy on his perch with one hand. "I feared you might change your mind, and send one of the maids. But the walk has tired you—you look pale."

"My head aches. There is thunder in the air," replied Teresa.

"That sky threatens a storm before night," he rejoined, nodding towards the west, where the sun was sinking in a blaze of lurid splendour. "Luckily, most of the wheat is carried," he added, setting the child on his feet as they reached the little house among the vines.

It was a low, white-walled building of one storey, with little deep-set casements, and a pink-tiled roof shaded by an old walnut tree. She looked about her disparagingly. "You are lodged like a peasant. You should have had the other house by the river."

"This is well enough—and look at the view! I can almost see the domes of Florence, far away, and at sun-rise the mountains yonder look as Dante described the hills of Paradise—'like sun-illumined gold.'"

She took her seat on the bench under the walnut tree, and glanced over the wide rich landscape, set, as in a frame, by the purple peaks of the majestic, melancholy Apennines. In the valley below, where the old house nestled among its sheltering woods, twilight was already gathering, and a white mist clung, ghost-like, to the stream, but the slopes above were bathed in sunset light, and the tawny white sheaves cast long shadows upwards over the stubble. The cicali chirped among the vines; the swallows chased each other with shrill cries, skimming round and over the cottage roof; the bell of a little church hidden among chestnut woods in the valley was ringing for Benediction.

It was all sweet, pensive, and peaceful, save for the threat of coming storm.

"From this point you can take in all your possessions at a glance," said the steward, who had installed himself on an overturned lemon pot opposite to her, with the boy between his knees. "It is a fair inheritance."

"Too much for a single woman, as my cousin often tells me."

"Some day you will give it a master," he said with a grave smile, stroking Angelo's curls, "though I am selfish enough to hope that day may be distant."

"What difference will it make to you?" she asked, turning her eyes upon him for a moment and looking away again.

"Well—when that event happens, I suppose I must strike my tent. You will scarcely need a steward when you have a husband to look after your interests."

"True," she acquiesced briefly, and was silent a moment.

"Should you be sorry to leave the farm?" she asked, after a pause, examining the veins of a fallen leaf.

He looked at her half reproachfully. "What a question! Where else shall I meet with such a home as I have had here, and such a friend as I have found in you? I owe you more than I can ever repay, Teresa."

She shook her head with a dubious smile. He did not see how her lips quivered, nor how her bodice heaved with the painful beating of her heart.

"Shall I prophesy your future as you do mine?" she asked lightly. "You will have a home of your own again some day, and—a wife."

He shook his head, looking away towards the mountains.

"I shall never marry again. I might if I were alone in the world; I should feel the need of some one to love. But as it is—I have my child; he is enough for me." And drawing the little fellow closer to him, he laid his bearded cheek on the fair curly head.

Her face changed, every trace of softness leaving it.

"The child—always the child!" she exclaimed, with a forced laugh; "as if there was nothing else in the world worth living for; as if——"

She checked herself abruptly, colouring to the temples. She dared not look at him; she knew that he was watching her perplexedly, and she feared he might read the secret in her eyes. At that moment she almost felt as if her love had turned to hatred. A great wave of anger rushed into her heart, filling it with pain and bitterness, then retreated, leaving her icily calm.

"You are a model father," she said, with the same discordant laugh; "it is to be hoped that Angelo will repay you for your devotion. But, to return to what we were discussing just now. I have no present intention of marrying, but it may be necessary for us to part, notwithstanding."

He started and looked at her as if he doubted whether he had heard correctly.

"Do you mean that you wish me to leave the farm?"

"I do not wish it, but it must be. I came here this afternoon with the intention of telling you so."

He looked at her in silence. His eyes were troubled and perplexed. "Have I offended you, Teresa?" he asked gently, at last. She averted her head.

"No."

'Then why do you send me away?"

"Because—because I find that gossip has been busy with our names."

He frowned. "Baldassare told you so, I suppose? I do not believe it, but even if it were true, need you care for the cackle of idle tongues? No one who knows you would misinterpret your generous friendship for me."

She gave him a curious glance. "No," she acquiesced slowly. "I suppose few people who know me would believe that I could wish to make my servant my master."

The words brought the blood to his olive cheek. He bit his lip, and looked away, more hurt than he would have cared to acknowledge. Never before had she made him feel his position; till that moment he had been her friend and equal. Now, all at once, a gulf opened between them. His heart sank with a sense of isolation and loss—and some other feeling which he could hardly define.

But pride came to his aid, and it was in a tone almost as cold as her own that he replied: "Perhaps you are right: it will be better for us to part. You will wish me to stay till you meet with a successor?"

"No—I shall dispense with a steward for the present," she said, rising.

"I will bring the books to-morrow evening and go over them with you."

"It is not necessary. You can send them. Good-bye."

"Teresa!" he exclaimed, in a tone of pain that went to her heart, "this is not to be our parting? You dismiss me without a word of regret—I, who have been your faithful friend and servant so long"—and his voice faltered. "What has come between us?" he added, taking her hand; "there is something more than you have told me."

"Let me go," she said, in a choked voice, turning her head aside.

"Tell me," he persisted; "do not let a misunderstanding part us. Is it anything I have done——"

"No, no, you are not to blame. Think what you like of me, but don't question me. Good-bye!" She snatched her hand from his and turned away. She felt that if she spoke another word she should break down altogether. Her throat ached with the effort to keep back her tears.

Little Angelo, struggling from his father's arms, ran and clung to her dress. "Tessa, take me with thee!"

"No, you must not come," she said, disengaging her skirt almost roughly. Then, as the child looked at her in wistful surprise, with a sudden revulsion of feeling she bent and kissed him again and again.

"Go back, carino, I cannot take thee now," she said gently.

But Angelo declined to be separated from her by anything short of force, and finally was carried off into the house by his old nurse wailing for "Tessa!"

Meraldi stood with folded arms, watching the girl's retreating figure as it passed from the sunlight of the slope into the mist and gloom of the valley. A dim perception of the truth was dawning upon his mind, though at first he refused to believe it. But conviction was forced upon him. Words, looks, and tones which he had hardly noticed at the time, returned to him all at once with the force of accumulated testimony. Teresa loved him.

The discovery almost took his breath away, and yet he wondered now that he had not made it before. "How blind I have been! If only I had known! And if I had, what then? I have no love to offer her in return. It is buried in Angela's grave."

He sat down on the bench under the walnut tree, covering his eyes with his hand. But when he would have conjured up the fair face of his dead wife, another face rose unbidden before him, and a pair of dark pleading eyes looked into his. He thrilled in all his veins, and his heart swelled with a feeling to which he could hardly give a title, but which was dangerously sweet.

Meanwhile, little Angelo had escaped from purblind old Lotta's surveillance and stolen out into the garden. Finding his father too absorbed in thought to notice him, he crept towards the gate, and after one or two backward glances, to make sure that his proceedings were unobserved, trotted off in pursuit of Teresa—a little flying figure, with the sunset glory on his curls, hurrying down through the vines and the wheat as fast as his feet would carry him. When Meraldi raised his head the child was out of sight. Old Lotta missed him presently, but was not concerned, taking it for granted he was with his father.

At length the steward roused himself with a sigh, and changed his position. Lighting a cigarette he sat smoking and looking down into the valley; while twilight deepened into night, and beyond Carrara the coming storm brooded and muttered.

An hour passed away. Darkness had gathered round the old farmhouse in the valley. Not a breath of wind stirred the trees, or shook the leaves from the pale autumn roses, and the only sound that broke the sultry silence was the restless murmur of the stream as it chafed over its rocky bed. Nature seemed to hold her breath in fear.

The farm-servants were at supper in the great bare kitchen—once the convent refectory—which was dimly lighted by bronze oil-lamps, suspended by chains from the vaulted ceiling. There was a mixed smell of wine and garlic and polenta, a cheerful buzz of voices and clink of glasses. Brigitta moved about, superintending the repast, her fingers mechanically busy with her knitting, while her keen eyes were everywhere, and her shrill tongue was seldom silent.

"Cielo! how black it is," she muttered, standing at the wide-arched entrance which opened on a courtyard, stored with piles of faggots, wine-vats, and oil-presses. "The storm that is coming will be the

worst we have had this year. It—— who is that?" she broke off, as a man's figure loomed out of the darkness.

"It is I—Meraldi," the steward's voice replied, and he entered, looking hot and breathless, as if he had been running. "Is Angelo here?"

"Angelo? My cousin took him back to the cottage this afternoon."

"She brought him, yes; but we thought he must have followed her home again. He is nowhere to be found."

"He is not here, that's certain. Teresa returned without him more than an hour ago. She has gone to bed with a headache."

He stared at her in dismay. "What has become of him then? Where is he?" he exclaimed.

There was a pause. The men looked up from their supper, interested and sympathetic.

"Perhaps the bambino has fallen into the stream—it runs deep by the bridge," one of them suggested in an undertone.

The steward put both hands to his broad chest, drawing a deep breath, as if in pain.

"It is more likely that he has wandered among the vines and got lost," put in Brigitta, hastily.

"In that case, mistress, the sooner he is found the better," said a stalwart young contadino in a striped shirt, as he threw down his knife and swung himself off the bench. "This is not a night for a man to be abroad, much less a child."

His example was at once followed by the others, and after a short delay, while lanterns were found and lighted, they set forth, headed by Meraldi, just as the storm broke. Not long afterwards Teresa made her appearance in the kitchen, startling her cousin, who supposed her to have retired for the night.

"Where are the men?" she asked. "I heard them go out just now."

"They are gone in search of the fattore's boy. He is lost."

"Lost! little Angelo? I left him safe at home."

"Yes, but he was missed afterwards, and they think he may have lost his way in attempting to follow you. By-the-bye," she added, "Count Baldassare may have seen him. He went up the hill just after you returned. Monica saw him."

"Yes," one of the maids assented; "he passed me on the bridge a few minutes after you came home, signorina. If the little lad was coming down the hill-road, he must have met him; though it is strange he did not ——"

Teresa interrupted her. She had turned very white, and there was a look of dread anxiety on her face. "Get me a lantern, Monica," she said, abruptly.

"Madonna mia! you are not going out?" her cousin exclaimed, while the girl stared at her without moving.

"A lantern—quick! do you hear?" she repeated, in a tone which admitted of no delay. When it was brought she lighted it at one of the lamps, then, disregarding Brigitta's inquiries and expostulations, she hurried from the house.

As she crossed the bridge she heard the voices of the men, who were searching the banks of the stream, and midway in the dark ilex-wood beyond she encountered Luigi, the young contadino who had first volunteered for the search.

"Padrona—it is you!" he exclaimed, raising his lantern to her face; "you should not be out in this storm."

"I am going to the tower, to inquire if Count Baldassare has seen the child."

"Let me call the fattore; he will go with you ——"

"No," she said, detaining him, "I would rather go alone, and you need not tell him you met me."

The storm increased every moment. So brief were the intervals of darkness that her lantern was hardly needed, the lightning showing her the white winding road before her, and the old tower, standing on the summit of the hill, like a sentinel forgotten at his post. She passed the cottage, where old Lotta was keeping anxious vigil, and making her way through a breach in the boundary wall which divided Baldassare's land from her own, mounted the steep slope to the ruin. The ground was strewn with old débris, overgrown with weeds and briars, and she stumbled more than once as she approached the tower, the entrance to which was by an iron-clamped, nail-studded door, deeply set in the massive wall. A faint light which gleamed from the narrow-barred casement showed that Baldassare was within, but the door was fast, and all was silent.

She raised her hand to knock, but let it fall again and hesitated. A sudden dread overcame her; she shrank from the thought of entering, and had half-turned, as if to retrace her steps, but at that moment a sound reached her from within, which banished her momentary hesitation and nerved her to meet any danger. It was the terrified cry of a child. Unconsciously she uttered an answering cry, and knocked with all her force, but the sound was lost in the uproar of the storm. She set down the lantern and groped about for a stone, with which she battered the door, calling upon Baldassare to admit her.

This time her summons was heard. There was a sound as of some heavy piece of furniture being dragged out of place, hurried footsteps, and the clang of a bolt withdrawn. Then the worm-eaten door creaked on its rusty hinges, and he stood before her, with a small oil-lamp in his hand—his face wild and white, his hair disordered, his breath coming quickly. She saw that he had been drinking heavily. Strangely enough, he expressed no surprise at seeing her.

"Ah—it is you," he said, with a curious smile. "I had a pre-

sentiment that you would come," and he drew back to allow her to pass in.

She found herself in a vaulted stone chamber, rounded to the shape of the tower, and containing no furniture but a small camp-bed, a couple of chairs, an antique oak "cassone," or chest, against the wall, and a table on which lay a gun.

One glance showed her these details, and it showed her also that Angelo was not there. She turned to Baldassare, who had followed her in and closed the door.

"Where is the child?"

He folded his arms, and leaned against the table, looking at her with a mocking composure which, somehow, seemed more ominous than violence. "He is here. I do not deny it. What then?"

"What then? You will give him up to me instantly. Where is he?" she asked, looking round. "Where have you hidden him? He—ah, cielo!" she broke off, setting down the lamp, "you have not——"

The words died on her lips.

"I have not murdered him, if that is what you mean," he finished, composedly. "He is safe enough—as yet. See for yourself."

He crossed the room, and dragging the chest away from the wall, disclosed a low, arched recess behind it, in which—dumb and paralysed with fear—little Angelo was crouching. At sight of Teresa the child uttered a breathless cry of joy, and sprang into her arms, clinging to her neck with the nervous force of terror, and hiding his face on her shoulder.

Without another word, without even a glance at Baldassare, she turned towards the door. He reached it before her, and set his back against it.

"Not yet," he said; "I have something to say to you."

"I will not listen to a word. Stand back—let me pass."

"Presently—on one condition."

"Condition? Do you suppose I will stay to make terms with you? Open that door, or I will cry for help, and bring those who will——"

Her words were drowned in a peal of thunder which shook the tower to its foundations.

"Cry for help, by all means," he resumed mockingly, when the sound died sullenly away. "Cry long and loud, and they may hear you—perhaps. But in the meantime you must listen to me, whether it pleases you or not."

She looked at him with a heaving bosom—too angry for the moment to feel afraid. "Speak, then—what is your 'condition.'"

After a moment's pause he came to her side. There was an expression on his face that made her shrink from him with mingled dread and loathing.

"Can you not guess, Teresa?" he questioned. He would have taken her hand, but she drew back, putting half the width of the tower between them, and, with a swift instinctive movement, snatched the long silver dagger from her dark hair.

"Come not a step nearer—I warn you!"

He laughed harshly.

"Excuse me. I forgot that my touch was contamination. You need not be alarmed, I will keep my distance. You may walk out of this place as freely as you came in, only"—he paused—"it must be as my promised wife."

"As your—you are mad!" she exclaimed. "You must know that not to save my life would I give you such a promise."

"But to save another's, perhaps?" he suggested, with a significant glance at the child.

She gazed at him blankly, her eyes dilating with horror, unconsciously folding her arms more closely round the boy, whose quick heart-beats throbbed against her bosom.

"You could not—you dare not!" was all she could say.

"Dare not? I dare anything now," he cried, with a wild laugh. "Do you not see that I am despairing and dangerous? Swear that you will be my wife—I will trust your oath—and you and the child shall pass out unmolested. Refuse—and as surely as you and I are standing face to face, Meraldi's boy shall never leave this place alive."

Looking into his eyes she realized that his words were no idle threat. For a moment she did not speak; only looked at him fixedly, feeling like one in an evil dream.

Outside there was a strange hush and lull, as if the storm, exhausted by its fury, were pausing to collect force for a fresh outburst. The sudden stillness had something ominous and threatening.

At length Teresa spoke again, facing him like an animal at bay.

"It would profit you little if I gave you that promise, for though I might stand at the altar with you, I would put the width of the world between us rather than spend a day beneath your roof."

His forced composure fell from him like a mask. His face turned livid, haggard, menacing. With a furious oath he caught up his gun from the table.

She drew back still further, putting the child behind her. She saw madness blazing in his eyes, and for a moment her heart failed her. But she faced him without flinching, never removing her eyes from his face, and, after a struggle, he seemed to command himself, and flung the gun upon the floor behind him.

"Promise me this, then," he said, in a hard, panting whisper, with his hand on her arm, and his face close to hers: "that if you will not be my wife, you will never be his—Meraldi's—while I live."

A faint dreary smile crossed her face. "I can safely promise that; I shall have no temptation to break my word."

"Swear it——"

"I swear it."

He kept his hand on her arm, looking up and down her face as i he were learning every feature by heart. His lips worked convulsively.

"Great heaven—how I love you!" he muttered brokenly, and before

she could prevent him, he threw his arms round her, and strained her to him in an embrace so fierce and passionate that it left her breathless. Then, suddenly relinquishing her, "Go, go," he said hoarsely, motioning her away, with averted head, "or I cannot answer for myself."

She waited for no second telling, but taking up Angelo again, opened the heavy door, and passed out into the gloom. She had moved only a few paces away when the darkness was rent by a flash which seemed to set earth and heaven on fire. Mingling with the uproar of the terrible peal that followed was another sound—a cracking, rending noise, which made her turn to look back at the building she had just quitted.

For a moment she saw its dark form looming above her, erect against the sky, then there was a crash of breaking timbers and falling stones, an avalanche of dust, and the old tower lay prostrate, burying three living creatures beneath its ruins.

## III.

For nearly an hour the men had been searching the hillside—among the wet and down-beaten vines, in the bare stubble fields, and up and down the banks of the stream, which, swollen by rain, rushed over the rocks with the sound of a mountain torrent.

"What was that noise?" the steward asked suddenly, in the pause after a deafening peal. "It sounded like the fall of a house."

"Per Bacco—it was the tower!" one of the men exclaimed. "I thought the old owl's nest would be down some stormy night. Luckily the Count is not there ——"

"But yes—he is there!" cried Luigi, excitedly, "and—Dio buono!" he broke off, "the signorina ——"

Meraldi turned towards him. "What do you mean? the mistress is not near the tower?"

"Yes—she went up to inquire if he had seen the boy. I met her in the wood half an hour ago. She told me to say nothing to you."

The steward stared at the speaker as if the sense of the words had not reached him. Then his face changed, as a sudden light burst on his mind. With a hoarse inarticulate cry he broke from his companions, and rushed up the steep road and across the slope to the spot where the tower had stood. A great formless heap of ruin, from which the dust was rising in clouds, was all that remained of the sturdy old building, which had resisted the shocks of centuries. He ran hither and thither distractedly calling "Angelo—Teresa!"

But there was "no voice, nor any that replied."

The storm, as if satisfied with the havoc it had worked, was now subsiding, the thunder dying away in deep sullen reverberations behind the mountains, though the rain still fell in torrents.

When the other men arrived they found the steward like one

stunned, gazing blankly at the ruins. He quickly roused himself, however, and despatched two of the men to the farm for spades and pickaxes. When these were brought they set to work with a will, lighted by pine torches, which cast a red flickering glare over the scene, giving it a strange air of unreality.

The women-servants, who had hurried up after the men, stood in a frightened group round Brigitta, who was mechanically muttering Aves and Paternosters, while the tears streamed down her brown wrinkled cheeks. Three hours passed thus; hours that were short to the workers, but long to the anxious watchers.

The rain had ceased, the air was cool and sweet, "like a breath from the innocent plains of Paradise," and the moon looked forth serenely from broken and dispersing clouds. It was close upon midnight, when there was a stir and murmur in the group which Meraldi was directing, then a sudden shout which brought the women hurrying to the spot. They had cleared away the débris above a great beam, which lay obliquely, one end wedged between fragments of masonry, while the other rested on the ground. In the hollow space thus formed, under the heap of ruin, lay Teresa and little Angelo —whether dead or living could not be told till, with infinite precaution, the heavy beam had been raised. It was soon ascertained that the child, though bruised and stunned, was not seriously hurt. He recovered consciousness almost immediately on being lifted out into the air, and clung to his father's neck with a cry that went to the hearts of all present.

But Teresa lay motionless, the blood trickling from a wound in her temple, and not the faintest sign of life in her white face and nerveless limbs.

Meraldi hastily set the boy on his feet, and knelt at her side, watching her face with agonized anxiety. White and inanimate in the moonlight, it looked like a beautiful mask. He lifted her head on to his knee, chafing her cold hand. "She is dead," he breathed, with a shudder that shook him from head to foot.

"No, she is only stunned," Brigitta assured him. "Look—she is coming to herself."

After a few moments, the girl's breast heaved in a long-drawn inspiration, her eyes unclosed and wandered round from face to face, vaguely at first, then with dawning recollection and intelligence.

She tried to raise herself. "Angelo?"

"He is safe—see," Brigitta replied, drawing the child forward. "What brought him up here is more than I can guess."

"I know," Meraldi muttered, with a sudden darkening of his face; "if my enemy lives he shall answer for it. Teresa," he added, bending his lips to her ear, "you risked your life to save my child, my own life shall show how I thank you;" and he passionately kissed the hand he held.

A faint colour flushed over her face, then faded again. "Thank

heaven I was in time," she whispered. "Baldassare is there—under the ruins. Try to save him—though he is—your enemy ——"

Her voice failed, and her head sank heavily back upon his knee.

"We must take her home at once," Brigitta said anxiously, "or to your cottage, fattore; it is the nearest." He assented.

"Go on working, men; I will be back presently," he said, and, raising her figure in his strong arms, he bore her away, followed by Brigitta and the other women.

It was many hours before Teresa recovered consciousness, and then only to pass from insensibility to delirium. For weeks she lay, tossing on a troubled tide of fever which threatened to bear her away from love and life to the shores of the silent land. At length the cloud passed from her senses, and she woke, as from a long oppressive dream, to find herself in a place which was strange, yet vaguely familiar to her. A quaint little chamber, with a tiled floor and a ceiling crossed by old blackened beams; with one low square casement looking out over a green hillside and a sea of vines towards the distant mountains, which were bathed in the ineffable brightness of early morning. The window was open, admitting the cool-scented air, and a sound of chimes from some distant convent mingled with sweet rustic noises of tinkling oxen-bells, creaking waggons, and the voices of contadini passing by to their work among the dewy vines.

Curled up on the floor was little Angelo, playing a solitary game of "morra," and near the window sat Brigitta, severely upright, and knitting energetically.

Teresa raised herself among the pillows, and uttered her cousin's name. The latter dropped her pins with a hasty "Santa Maria!" and was at her side in a moment, while Angelo scrambled up on the bed.

"Do you know me, carina?" the housekeeper inquired.

The girl extended her hand with a smile.

"Of course I do, my good cousin," she said, faintly; "but I hardly know myself—I feel so weak and strange. This is not my room," she added, looking round.

"No, you are at the fattore's cottage: they brought you here that dreadful night ——"

"Ah—I remember," the girl interrupted, with a shudder, covering her eyes with her hand. "Was Count Baldassare found—alive?" she asked after a moment, without looking up.

"Yes, he was alive. He—but you must not question me now. I will tell you more when you are better."

"He is alive—that is all I wish to know; please never mention his name to me again," she said quickly, a faint colour rising to her cheeks.

Her companion gave her a dubious glance, but said nothing.

"Where is Meraldi?' Teresa asked presently.

"Not far off, for certain. He has hardly left the house since you were ill, and he looks like a ghost himself. Certainly he has more feeling than I gave him credit for ——"

A gentle tap at the door interrupted her.

"Is she conscious?" the steward's voice inquired. "I thought I heard her speaking."

"Let him come in," Teresa interposed, and he was admitted.

His cheeks were scarcely less white than her own, and his strong hand trembled like a leaf as he laid it on hers. He looked down at her, and tried to speak, but his voice failed him, his chest heaved convulsively. Suddenly he turned aside, and rested his arm against the wall, laying his forehead upon it.

"Do not," she said brokenly; "do not, Antonio." But the tears were running down her cheeks as she spoke.

After a moment he turned and looked at her again; at the lovely pallid face, with the subdued expression which gave it a new charm; at the great dark eyes which seemed almost too large for the wasted features. His hand closed on hers with a passionate pressure that almost hurt her.

"Heaven is merciful," he breathed; "it has given you back to us from the very gates of death. What should I have done if the fever had taken you!" She shook her head with a wistful smile.

"It would not have mattered—you would still have had Angelo," she said, laying her disengaged hand on the boy's fair curls.

Meraldi regarded her a moment without speaking. There was a look in his eyes she had never seen before; a look which sent a thrill of mingled joy and sadness to her heart.

"Ay—I should still have had my boy," he said at last, in his deep grave voice, "and once I told you that I needed no other love but his. But in the very hour I spoke those words I began to find out my mistake. Teresa, if you had been taken, the void in my life could never, never have been filled! Dear—I have been blind and insensible, but I know my own heart now, and if it is not too late——Why do you look at me so piteously?"

"It is too late," she breathed, in a voice scarcely audible.

"Carissima—you will not let pride stand between us?"

"Pride? ah no; pride cannot stand before the might of love——"

"You love me? then what need keep us apart?"

"My vow," she faltered; "the vow that was wrung from me that terrible night ——"

"That night?" he interrupted; "ah, I begin to understand. Baldassare made you promise that you would never be my wife ——"

"While he lived," she concluded.

He straightened his tall figure and looked at her with a sudden change of expression. "While he lived? then you do not know——"

She raised herself among the pillows, looking from him to her cousin.

"Brigitta told me he was living."

"He was alive when we found him, but injured beyond hope of recovery. He lived long enough to receive absolution, after making a confession, the substance of which you and I can guess. But for you, Teresa, I believe I should never have seen my child again."

"Do not let us think of it," she said, with a shudder.

"No," he agreed, "let it be forgotten like a bad dream. We can afford to forget the past—the present is so sweet, and the future——"

"The future?" she repeated, as he paused.

He bent and looked into her eyes with a tender, pleading smile.

"My future is in your hands," he whispered. "It rests with you to make it dark or sunny. My love—my dear heart, you will not send me away? You will let me stay—as your 'prime minister'?"

She put up her arms and drew his head still lower.

"No; stay—as my king," she whispered, and laid her lips to his.

## A BIENTÔT.

FAREWELL, bright dawns and perfume-laden airs,
Faint with the breath of roses newly blown—
Warm slumbrous noons, when sleep our haunting cares,
Long summer days and nights, too swiftly flown.
With sighs and sad regrets we saw you go:
Why did you leave us, who had loved you so?

'Neath sapphire skies, and starry hedgerows sweet,
Laced with gold threads of gossamer, we went,
Wild summer blooms beneath our wandering feet,
And summer in our hearts; our love intent.
"I will return," you said "when roses blow,"
That time we said "good-bye," a year ago.

But I alone have seen them bloom and die,
While you have passed beyond these shadows here
Into the light. I'll follow by-and-bye.
Meantime I wait, and hold the roses dear,
And summer sacred, for the love I bear;
Until we meet again, some day, somewhere.

E. L.

# IN THE BLACK FOREST.

By Charles W. Wood, Author of "Through Holland," "Round About Norway," &c.

The Albthal.

I WAS at St. Blasien. I wished to see the Albthal and the Wehrathal, two valleys of the "highest consideration;" yet I had arranged to be at Schaffhausen on a given day. How was this to be done?

"There is nothing for it," said the amiable bookkeeper, "but to do those valleys, return here, and then go on to Schaffhausen."

Mistaken advice, followed for want of better knowledge; leading to much unnecessary trouble, and ending in a wildgoose chase after the picturesque. Furthermore, the hotel people consented to take charge of a small portmanteau; having to return to St. Blasien in three or four days, it was unnecessary to drag it about the country. But, on returning, they demanded half price for a room for each day's absence. A mild protest against this extortion was received, metaphorically speaking, with the thunders of Jove; and, having a wholesome horror of tempests, weak submission was an inevitable consequence.

At two o'clock, one lovely afternoon, the diligence started for Albbrück. Remembering that, in the Black Forest, possession of the outside place forms the ten points of the law, I was on the spot twenty minutes before the time. There was but one outside seat on this vehicle besides the driver; or it might be two seats with a great deal of clever packing. It stood in the middle of the road, the horses, as yet, not put to. I took the seat, and became absorbed in a book; feeling, nevertheless, the cynosure of neighbouring and inquisitive eyes.

To the right the great dome reared its ponderous head ; the noise of the rattling machinery in the once beautiful and vast monastery might be heard like the rushing of distant waters ; the hills, with their green slopes or dark pine forests, rose on all sides ; clefts and passes opened up here and there, leading out into the world or yet further into the mountains. The sun distributed his rays with a dazzling heat that was fast converting this coveted outside seat into a fiery furnace. One counted the moments when we should be in motion, rising out of this " deep depression."

Ten minutes before the time, came strolling down the road three Germans. The world might have belonged to them ; the diligence at least they made sure of. When they saw the outside place already in possession of the enemy, nothing could equal their astonishment. They stood, and in a series of asides abused the world in general. That a mere Englishman should have the presumption to take the place they, Germans as they were, had marked out for themselves, was a crime beyond the pale of any Pope's indulgence.

One of the trio was so overcome that he brought out a huge flask of kirschwasser, holding about a pint, wherewith to drown their indignation, and using it too roughly, broke it in twain. Having reduced the contents by one-half, this was handed to the coachman (the horses were put to by this time and the courier was on his box), who disposed of the remainder so promptly that I trembled for our safety in passing precipices. With a few final sarcasms the three Germans entered the diligence, and we started. Their intention had been to pack themselves two on the box and one on the top.

Away, out of quaint, curious St. Blasien. If the earth has round corners this is one of them. Away, beside the running stream, past the benign figure of St. Blasius, in the act of administering a perpetual benediction upon a fountain. Sweeping round the road we were soon launched upon the Albthal. Blue skies and sunshine flooded our path. The rippling water and waving, rustling trees sang so sweet a song that it all aroused a delight beyond the power of words. I pitied the three Germans, and evidently they pitied themselves.

For, suddenly, there was an energetic tapping at the window. The diligence pulled up, and out stepped one of them. Next he managed to scramble on to the roof, and, disposing himself amongst the luggage like a bale of merchandize, settled down into a broad, visible contentment.

Some twenty minutes elapsed, and another urgent summons from the interior brought us to a second halt. Number two of the trio now came out and joined his friend upon the roof. Again we went on for some distance, when number three plucking up courage, beat a tattoo that brought us to a standstill, and out *he* came. Would *he*, too, climb the roof? and, if so, would it bear the strain? Not at all. With profuse apologies, but in a very matter-of-fact way, he sat himself down on the box. Being unusually stout, if the two already

occupying the box had not been of Pharaoh's lean kine, the consequences would have been a precipitate descent into the abyss to our right.

The Germans, now in a state of bliss, were as polite as lately they had been sarcastic. But they were not yet disposed of.

Still I was glad they had come outside, and was willing to endure the discomfort of close packing. In the enjoyment of great pleasures one likes to feel that all who possibly can have their just share and proportion. The scenery was growing magnificent, even sublime, but from the interior of a coach much of it would have been lost. As it was, the two Germans perched on the roof had decidedly the best of it.

It was a glorious drive; a succession of views far grander than anything I had yet seen in the Black Forest. Travelling onwards, it reminded one of some of the best parts of the Tyrol, with all the romantic beauty and grandeur of that loveliest of countries. George Sand thoroughly appreciated the Tyrol, and looked upon it as a spot especially favoured. "Voir le Tyrol et mourir," is the burden of some of the pages in her "Lettres d'un Voyageur." And she makes one of her characters remark to a fellow traveller who was praising up some favourite spot: "Ah, madame, vous n'avez pas vu le Tyrol."

All who know the Tyrol can imagine for themselves the loving, longing tone with which the words would be uttered; the tremulous regret that would linger in the voice of the poor traveller, whose back was turned perhaps for ever upon those lovely and beloved haunts. Home for ever must be home; but when it is cast amongst all that is beautiful in creation—who then can measure the affection that home inspires?

To-day as our road ascended, the valley deepened into a precipitous ravine, covered with ferns, bramble and tangle; everything that was wild and spontaneous in nature. Far down, ran the frothy River Alb, here and there spanned by bridges of dark gray stone. Every now and then an exclamation would burst forth from enraptured lips on the top of the coach. Say what you will of the phlegmatic temperament of the Germans, at least they have an ardent appreciation of the beauties of earth. These raise them to the highest point of enthusiasm, where most Englishmen would look on with a calm approval; dignified, it may be admitted, but cold.

Looking back upon the road we had travelled, the valley fell away in folds of magnificent verdure, fold upon fold, slope beyond slope. In the far distance, mountains bounded the horizon, faint, misty, melting into mere dreams, black with pine forests. Every turn opened up fresh beauties. Here and there we passed a village, perched on the very summit of some mountain height. One of these the post-boy pointed to as his home. He had not been to it for four years, nor seen any of his people—although constantly pass-

ing almost within sight of them. They have no holidays, these diligence drivers; but they have hard, constant work, and, for pay, their food and about enough money to keep them in tobacco.

In winter the coach is often turned into a sledge, and travels day after day in a country white with snow. The roads are iron-hard with frost; the trees glisten in the sun; the cold is so intense that the driver cannot feel the reins. Often he has to trust to the horses alone. An exquisite picture no doubt, but for the poor post-boy too severe an experience to possess any charms.

To-day there was nothing of all this. It was summer; the a

ST. BLASIEN.

was soft and warm; the sun, if anything, too overpowering; there was life and breath in all nature. The road was cut out of the mountain side; with occasional short tunnels pierced through the solid rock.

The gorge twisted and turned about, displaying all kinds of angles and abrupt curves, covered with the wildest, most romantic verdure. The coach dashed along at the very edge of the precipice. We gazed into great depths; a billowy ocean of forest trees and wild heath-land. We soared above the world. And yet, all the time, far above us towered the mountains right and left. Once or twice—strange sight in this most remote, most lonely valley—we passed a great cotton factory, which sends forth its work into the gay world.

Half way on our journey we stopped for ten minutes to rest the

horses. The inn overhung the steep sides of the ravine. The hills, towering above, overshadowed it. The old stone bridge beside it spanned the chasm and led to the cotton mill hard by. A caravan had encamped at the foot of the bridge, on the green mountain slope. Its occupants might have belonged to a tribe of Spanish gipsies; perhaps did so. Dark, flashing eyes, and rich warm complexions had they; a man and a woman, as handsome as they could well be, and two children; one playing a drum, the other fondling a great dog that submitted to have his tail pulled and his throat strangled with the most resigned air in the world.

There was something strangely interesting about these gipsies: an air of refinement quite wanting in the gipsies that haunt our woods and commons and solitary highways. They might have been termed high caste gipsies. It might be, had their pedigree been traced, that the blood of many successive generations ran in their veins. Possibly they possessed hereditary rights and claims; in the far distant past, even the boast of heraldry or the pomp of power.

But the gipsies, the inn, and all its romantic surroundings had to be left, and the journey continued towards Albbrück. A diligence is almost as merciless as time and tide. We went on and on through the wildest and most romantic scenery. At length the descent towards Albbrück commenced; the magnificent grandeur of the Albthal was left behind. But I thought then that I had seen nothing in the Black Forest to compare with this drive, and I think so still. Whatever else is neglected by the traveller, the Albthal assuredly must be seen.

We descended rapidly to the level of the plain and to Albbrück; a small manufacturing place, quietly busy, surrounded by green pastures, more or less marshy, through which the Alb flowed onward to the Rhine. That classic river, with its green, swift-flowing waters was stretched before us. Immediately beyond rose a chain of hills clothed with vineyards; villages here and there presenting a picture of quiet Swiss life. Here the Rhine divides Switzerland from Germany; a fair boundary mark; surrounded by an atmosphere of romantic legends without end.

The diligence crossed over the rails and drew up at the inn; small, unpretending, but not uncomfortable quarters, kept by two brothers, who do their best for their visitors, and do it in a pleasant way. Here I was to take train for Brennet, the station for the Wehrathal. It was five o'clock and the train would not start before eight. Thus there was time to explore the neighbourhood.

A pleasant walk, though there was little enough to be seen. A stroll through a quiet country district; a few old cottages scattered about and forming a village; the inhabitants, many of them at their suppers, sitting at round wooden tables near wide open doors. A savoury mess sent forth its odorous steam into the air. They live simply, these people; poor, yet not in poverty; having enough with

their bit of land, their garden, and their cow, added to their daily toil, to make both ends meet.

For them, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof; the morrow takes care of itself; their wants are so few that what would be improvidence with some is not so with them. These remote villagers are a law unto themselves, and cannot be judged by the ordinary rules of life. With few advantages and no opportunities, they are, in a sense, dependent as children. The HAND that marks even the sparrow fall, seems to watch over them with special care. The age of miracles is past and it no longer rains manna from the skies, but these poor villagers fail not in their daily bread.

I felt a strong temptation to go in to these cottagers at their supper, and for a moment make one with them; note the old picturesque rooms black with age or smoke, or both; the rude, quaint furniture. But a sense of intrusion, often misplaced, a wonder how our entrance would be received, frequently causes us to neglect opportunities it would have been wise to make use of. So I passed by the open doors and found myself on the banks of the Rhine. The river had not been so swollen for some years, and was rushing quickly onwards. To-night its waters were a pale, beautiful, transparent green. On the opposite banks, the heights, bearing vineyards, rose abruptly. A few houses of the Swiss village almost overhung the water, casting reflections thereon. The air swarmed with insects.

It was a calm, singularly beautiful evening. The heat of the day was over; the declining sun flushed the sky; all was peace and harmony. The very insects, countless myriads though they were, whirled about without any sound.

Leaving all this at length, and making slow way towards the inn, suddenly I came upon a lady, evidently a stranger, and in search of something. Her eyes glanced right and left, and she too seemed interested in the cottages and the lives they sheltered. Then she stopped, and—being German—spoke in excellent English.

"Can you tell me," she said, "where the Alb flows into the Rhine? I so much want to see it. I looked about for it this afternoon, but could not find the spot, and somehow I did not like to ask the villagers. It must be somewhere about here."

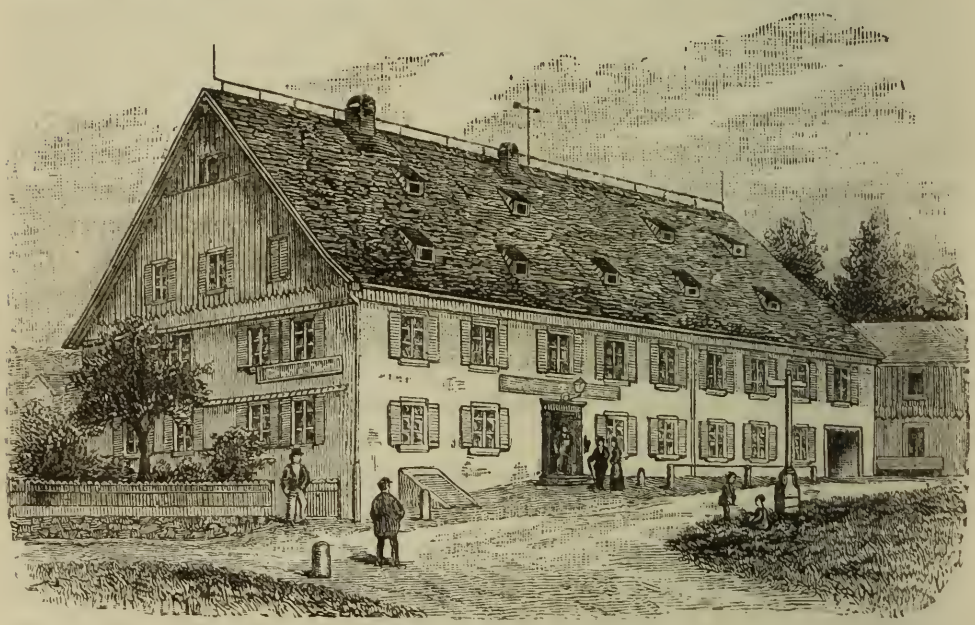
It was the very thing I had been looking at for the last half-hour. So I went back with her down the road; then to the left past some cottages, where an old man and a boy (their supper ended) were sawing wood. Yet a little way over rough ground, where all trace of road had disappeared, and there was the little river yielding up its life to the greater. My companion looked on with evident interest.

"I quite love the little Alb," she said, after a long pause given up to gazing. "For the last six weeks I have been staying at Höchenschwand—quite in sight of the Alb—for the sake of the mountain air. I spent one season at Davos, but the air of Höchenschwand

seems to me almost as good. You are more quiet, too, and less shut in by the mountains."

"But, on the other hand, is Höchenschwand not too dull and lonely?" I inquired. "It seemed so, the night I went up to it."

"It would be very dull," returned the fraülein, "but we happened to have pleasant people staying in the house. Two old generals amused me very much, one English, the other German. Neither could speak a word of each other's language, and their efforts to compare notes and tell anecdotes were most amusing. Often I would translate for them, but I was not always at hand, and occasionally I would come in to find both red in the face with trying to keep up a conversation. They were charming old men."



INN AT SCHLUCHSEE.

"Do you know any other part of the Black Forest?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "Before going to Höchenschwand I was staying at the inn at Schluchsee. I did not like it. They put me into the 'dependence' over the stables. It was very disagreeable, and the horses at night made so much noise that I could not sleep. The first day, when my maid was unpacking, a servant came in and said: 'You need not trouble to do that; no one ever stays in this room.'"

"And did you stay?"

"In that room? Only one night. I could not stand it. Altogether, I was glad to leave Schluchsee. It was so uncomfortable for my maid, too, that I sent her back to Frankfort."

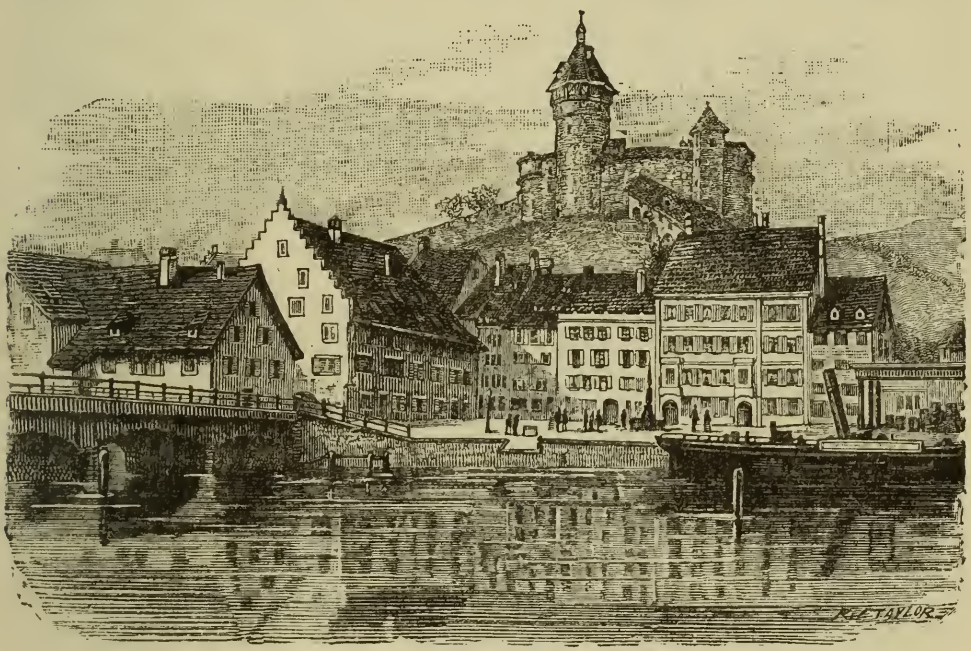
"And you liked Höchenschwand?"

"Oh, very much. The place was so lovely, the air so bright, the Hotel Maier so comfortable. Everything was done to make one's

stay agreeable. Madame Maier, too, was so nice. She is the niece of the great painter Winterhalter, and I believe he left her much of his property. He wanted her to keep this hotel. He himself belonged to Menzenschwand; but he loved this place, and he wanted others to come and love it too. Yet I was very nearly never getting to Höchenschwand."

"How was that?" was the natural inquiry.

"They wanted to charge me so much for a carriage from Schluchsee that I would not pay it. I said I would take the diligence instead. I requested the conductor to put me down at a particular spot where I could get some one to take my luggage to Höchenschwand. He replied in the rudest way that he was not obliged to



SCHAFFHAUSEN.

give up my luggage before we got to St. Blasien, and he should do as he pleased. Of course, he wanted a bribe. Finally, he put me down, bag and baggage, in the middle of the high road, at the most lonely part, and left me standing there, no creature within sight or sound."

"An unpleasant position," I remarked, sympathetically. "That conductor ought to have been reported. How did you manage?"

"Fortunately, a man came up, who carried my box for me," she replied, "and I contrived to carry my bag. But was not that a most unpleasant position for what you English call an 'unprotected female?' Left in the middle of the high road with her luggage, in an unknown country, perfectly abandoned. I never felt so hopeless and miserable in my life."

"Yet is it not singular," I ventured to remark, "that in our most

hopeless situations, something invariably turns up which exactly fits into our need?"

"I have always found it so," returned my companion. "And it has often struck me that if we possessed supernatural vision and knowledge, we should find that our extremities have all been foreseen and the remedy provided: even the small perplexities of everyday life. I remember a sentence in one of your English divines with which I was much struck at the time I read it; it was this: 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity.' I have never forgotten it."

Thus talking we found ourselves once more at the railway inn, where the three Germans were comfortably seated at table, taking refreshment. There was yet an hour to the departure of the train, and it was not an unwise way of passing the time. My destination that night was a small country inn, mysteriously obscure as to all information that could be gained concerning it. When I found that the three Germans were bound for the same place, I began to fear that even accommodation might fail.

After I had been seated a few minutes, they held a short conversation together in solemn undertones. Then the spokesman of the party turned to me.

"We sleep at Brennet to-night," said he.

"So do I," I replied.

"To-morrow we are going up the Wehrathal to Schönau," he continued.

So was I.

"We are going up the Belchen," he confided. It was very good of him to be so communicative, but the information was not interesting. I was not going up the Belchen. I saw that he was leading up to something, and the next remark brought it out.

"We are going to take the diligence up the Wehrathal to-morrow, and if there are only three outside seats we intend to have them."

What could be said to this very impertinent, very ungentlemanly speech? To resent it would be too humiliating, and the days of pistols and coffee are over. So merely replying that I hoped the diligence would yield room for all, I became absorbed in the baked meats on the table, and consigned the Germans to oblivion.

The train arrived, and in due course we reached Brennet, and a pitch dark platform. What had come to the night and the stars? The first person I accosted was the landlord of the little inn, looking out for possible passengers. Had he not been there, hardly should I have found my way even across the road, so inky black and bewildering was the night. As it was, I was safely within the inn, and quietly shut into a little sanctum before the train had well left the platform, and long before the three Germans (who were no more to be got rid of than the slippers in the Eastern tale) had appeared upon the scene.

In less than three minutes there suddenly burst forth a storm o

rain and hail, thunder and lightning, the fury of which could scarcely be greater. Yet half-an-hour ago the sky had been cloudless. It is these storms the vine-growers dread so much. Anyone hearing the storm that night could understand the dread, realise the destruction. I thought of the vineyards seen only that evening on the banks of the Rhine, and wondered how much of their beauty and worth would be lost in the tempest.

Alas! the next morning the rain was still falling in torrents, without visible hope of abatement. The Germans were up and dressed, had breakfasted, and departed in a hired conveyance, all in a quarter of an hour. They meant to post on to Wehr and catch the diligence, but found, on arriving at Wehr, that the diligence was a mere myth. We had all been misinformed. So, disgusted with the weather and the phantom coach, they altered their plans and posted on to Zell, there to take train; giving up the Wehrathal, Schönau, and the Belchen. After leaving Brennet, the slippers were finally disposed of: I saw the Germans no more.

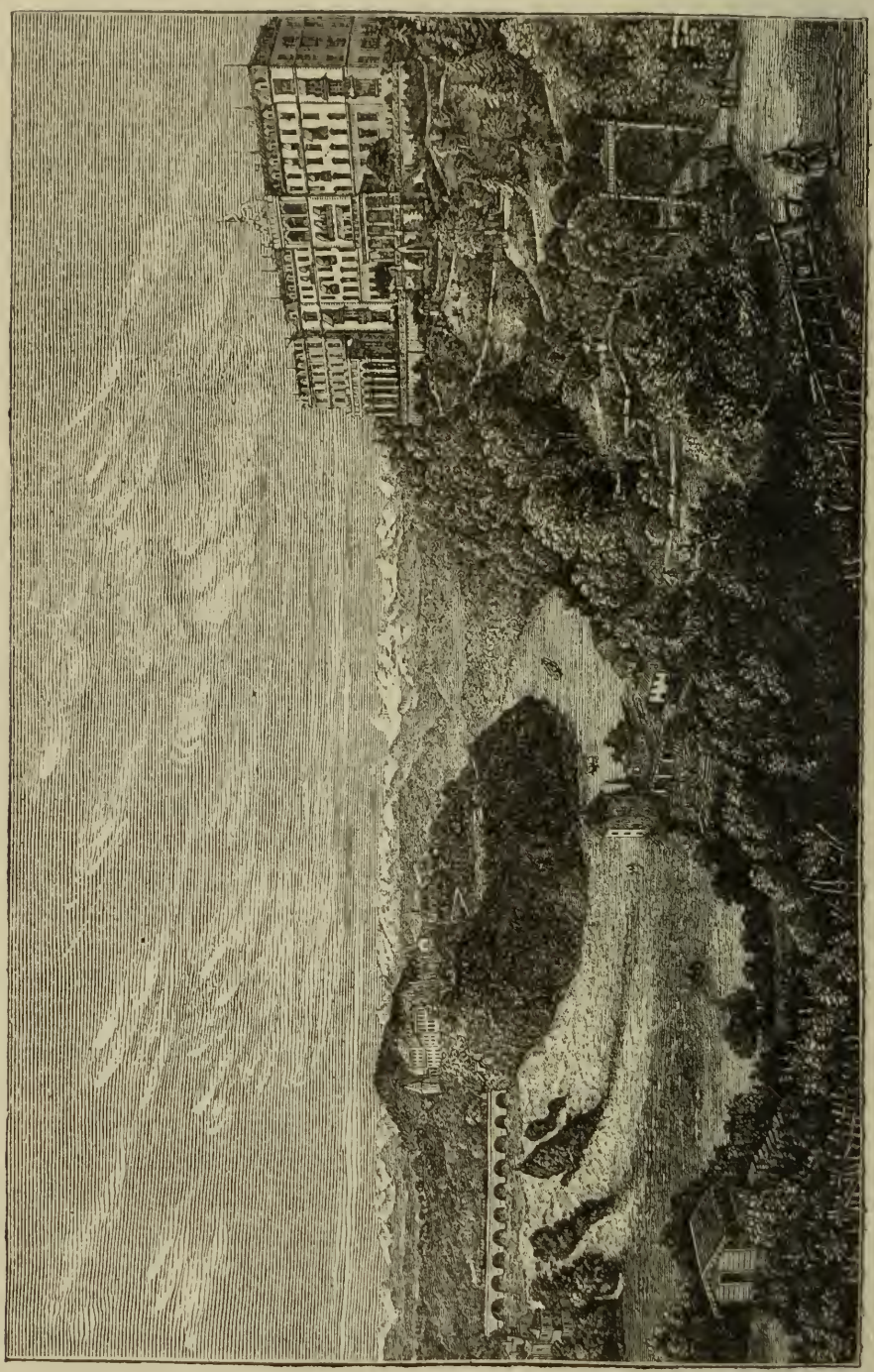
The omnibus for Wehr started about seven o'clock from the Brennet post-office, a five minutes' walk from the inn. The rain came down in torrents, and in torrents we reached Wehr. To attempt to go up the Wehrathal were folly and madness. There was nothing for it but to put up at the little Hotel Brügger, and hope for better weather.

It was all very well to hope; it never came. For three days the skies wept. It was a small country place, not very much more than a village. Between the showers I wandered up and down the one long street, gazed at the people, who gazed in return; watched the men threshing out grain with flails, the rhythm of their beat falling hour after hour monotonously on the ear. From dawn to sunset they worked away, scarcely ever resting, except now and then to note with amusement the curiosity of a stranger, and good-humouredly bid him join in the work.

To vary the occupation and pass the lingering hours, I strolled through a picturesque, but muddy, country road to the village of Hasel. Here at the inn a boy, with a key and a bundle of torches, soon made himself ready to act as guide to the famous stalactite cavern, which reaches to an impenetrable distance, and is said to possess the curiosity of white flies and blind white spiders.

A walk of half a mile through wet fields and verdant banks. The spot reached, we equipped ourselves in a becoming dress (these disguises always are becoming) kept for such occasions in a locked-up room, and were soon groping down a long flight of stairs into the singular interior. Our torches threw a weird gleam about the cavern, sufficient to make darkness visible, and enable us to see here and there a projecting point of rock, just after it had half cracked our heads with the most friendly intentions. Our own forms and faces stood out grotesquely. We might have been demons belonging to unmentionable regions.

It was interesting as a stalactite cavern, a work of the ages. The guide explained everything very intelligently, and showed some sense of grim humour in his quaint remarks. Of course there was



NEUHAUSEN.

the lake, the organ, the pulpit, the death's head and the living face, and a number of other natural devices. Some were very good; others, perhaps, might have been better if turned upside down. The cave is worth visiting if it falls in one's way and disturbs no settled

plans. Under other circumstances, it may just as well be passed over, and none need very much regret the omission. For purposes of observation or zoological study, it may be of value, for it dates back to a far distant past; but mere sentiments of curiosity will perhaps be met by a slight feeling of disappointment.

The return to Wehr, over the fields, afforded one the mild excitement of picking a way through pools and acres of mud; a short cut to the village, and hardly worse than the road had been. The day passed on to night; it would be out of the natural order of things not to do so; and the sympathetic landlady prophesied that the morrow would prove everything fair skies could make it.

We were a small weather-bound party, with no human element of discord, as good fortune would have it. At night, when the lamp was lighted in the little salle, the party was increased by a few neighbours, who dropped in to play cards and drink mild beer. Conspicuous amongst them was a "Herr Bar*on*." The landlady gave him his full title at every other word, as she sat in a sociable way at the table, looked on at the game, and advanced her opinion whenever an interesting point arose; keeping an eye the while on the glasses, and rising, unbidden, to refill an empty measure with the light, frothy beverage of the country.

The "Herr Baron" was a model of strength and energy, and would now and then bring down his card upon the table with an emphasis that animated the glasses. He had a very determined expression of countenance, as befitted a "Herr Baron," and a way of speaking that seemed to defy contradiction. Yet, with it all, he was very pleasant and unassuming, although from the quiet deference paid him by the rest of the little German assembly, he was evidently much above them in rank. I wondered where he came from, whether he lived in some ancient castle on the hillside, surrounded by woods, shot bears in the winter, and hunted the chamois in summer; whether his ancestors had once owned and occupied the now ruined castle on the hill behind the inn.

So the night passed, and the next day proved, if anything, worse than the day before. The landlady was no true prophet, and was apologetic as well as sympathising. The Wehrathal was still an impossibility. The clouds were low, and enwrapped the mountains; the rain still descended like a deluge; the little band of weather-bound travellers consulted the weeping skies, looked mournfully at each other, shook their heads in harmony, and tried to be philosophical.

But all the philosophy in the world could make of Wehr nothing but a dull, tame, and uninteresting place in which to be imprisoned. Everyone agreed upon this point, when, night having once more fallen, the small coterie, including the Herr Baron, had again assembled to play cards and drink beer, and chat over the news of the day. Just then the topic in the newspapers was the sad and fluctuating

state of President Garfield. There was a division upon the point—one half fearing he would die, the other half assured of recovery. Would they had been right! His death was amongst the mysterious events in life that, unable to fathom, we accept in faith.

The next morning those eternally weeping skies were too much for human endurance, or any amount of philosophy. The little band chartered the omnibus to Brennet, and took flight. But for the advice given me at St. Blasien, I might now have gone straight on to Schaffhausen, there quietly to await better days; instead of which I was compelled to return up the Albthal in the wind and the rain, the cold and the night, get my luggage, pay my bill, and find that, for all this extra trouble, expense and discomfort, they had added insult to injury by charging half price for a room simply for taking charge of a small portmanteau.

At Brennet the whole day was before me. It was useless reaching Albbrück before five o'clock, at which hour the diligence started for St. Blasien. So, to break the journey, I stopped half-way at Laufenburg on the Rhine.

It is an old, dilapidated-looking place, quaint and ancient enough to satisfy the most advanced lover of antiquity. The Rhine rushes through the old covered bridge at express speed, as if it would hurl it to destruction. Houses that look as if they dated back to the flood overhang the river, and make the place at once old-world, curious and picturesque. They appear grey, poverty-stricken, abandoned houses, but are not so in reality. The people who inhabit them have all they need, and perhaps a little to spare. Just below the bridge the Rhine is at its very narrowest. The water rushes between great rocks in an unceasing torrent with a force at once terrific and startling.

There is a very good hotel at Laufenburg—the Hotel Soolbad—and it seemed under excellent management. It overlooks the Rhine, and in summer is frequented by people who go there for the salt baths. Its situation is excessively picturesque, and pleasant walks abound. The Rhine was so swollen that the gardens were swamped, boats were turned upside down, and altogether the place looked very much out of its normal condition. The waters were in the cellars; and to-morrow, said the manager, almost with tears in his eyes, his dining-room would be flooded, unless they began to subside.

The table d'hôte consisted of a cluster of ancient but no doubt amiable ladies, the remnant of the season, who having taken a course of the baths, had, let us hope, benefited thereby. They spoke in high terms of the manager, and regretted that the hotel was not properly known and patronised.

Albbrück. It was still raining hard when the diligence started for St. Blasien at a quarter past five. But the interior was unendurable, and, defying wind and weather, I took place beside the courier. The grandeur of the drive was conspicuous, in spite of lowering

clouds, rain, and thorough discomfort. At the wayside inns the driver was equal to any number of "kirschwassers," and one almost envied him his capacity; at least, it helped to keep up his animation.

About nine o'clock we reached St. Blasien, cold, wet and miserable. Was it any wonder that for two pins one could have consigned the givers of bad advice to annihilation? I saw little of St. Blasien on this occasion. Arriving in darkness, before eight o'clock the next morning I had breakfasted, paid the bill, and was, bag and baggage, for the second time on the road to Albbrück.

At Albbrück I took train for Neuhausen. Before that station was reached the capricious weather had changed. All was once more blue skies and sunshine, and at the Schweizerhof one found rest, quiet, and civilisation for the Sunday.

Schaffhausen is a short, pleasant walk from Neuhausen, or the hotel omnibus will take you to it. It is an antiquated town, with much that is curious and picturesque. Everyone stops at Neuhausen, but none should neglect at least one visit to the old town. The houses overlooking the river are a picture in themselves; and there are ancient buildings, monuments, and fountains that have seen the rise and fall of many generations.

It was no longer the Black Forest, but a new country, new scenes. Below the Schweizerhof at Neuhausen flowed the green waters of the Rhine; before it were the grand falls of Schaffhausen, a wide mass of seething foam and rushing, tumbling water. Across the Rhine stretched the chain of the snowy Alps, and the canopy of blue sky beyond was a fitting background to this earthly paradise. Later on, when night had fallen, the moon threw a silvery gleam upon the river, lighting up the falls to the point of enchantment. Nothing could be more lovely, more romantic than the scene. Save for the rushing water, the whole surrounding neighbourhood was steeped in silence.

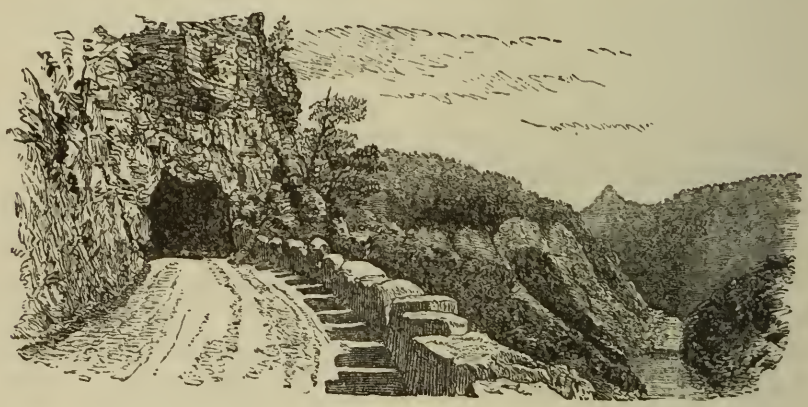
Sunday rose clear and brilliant, one of the hottest days of that summer. From the windows of the hotel one gazed upon a fair Sabbath scene of beauty and romance. The slopes leading from the hotel to the river were half cultivated, half wild. The hotel itself was excellent, one of its chief points being the pretty girls that waited in the dining-room in the picturesque costumes of the country. They went through their duties with a quietness, a certain grace not easily accounted for. Later on, the landlord explained the mystery.

It was an experiment he had now tried for two seasons, with a success one could very well imagine. These young women were not ordinary servants, and were not so treated by him. None of them were obliged to go out to service; some were the daughters of physicians and men in that rank of life; the father of one of them was a chief member of the Senate.

They came for two or three months in the year; came to see a little of life, and to be initiated into the mysteries of house-keeping.

Thus when they married they would not be quite ignorant of these important matters. They had their own sitting-room, and their sole duty was to wait in the salle à manger. With their rich velvet bodices, gay petticoats and silver ornaments, they looked wonderfully picturesque. For their services they received, at the end of the season, a sum which served them as pocket-money. Not a few, said the landlord, were reluctant to leave the gay scene for their quiet country homes, when the time came. No doubt to many the comparison was in favour of the hotel.

The landlord, on his side, could have found no better plan for adorning his dining-room. It was the picture that remained longest in the mind after leaving Neuhausen. The large cool room decorated with tropical plants; its great open windows looking on to the green, sparkling waters of the Rhine, the rushing, wonderful falls of Schaff-



The Albthal.

hausen, the picturesque Schloss Laufen above them; and, prettiest sight of all, because most human, the maidens that moved about so quietly in their costumes, waiting upon you with so gentle a manner, that they took all hearts captive.

I left it all on the Monday morning to return to the Black Forest. But that return was the beginning of the end. A few more days and the scene would change to a land of small romance and great realities, but which, no doubt, possesses special virtues of her own.

And, gentle reader, you, whose patience, I fear, has been sorely taxed in rambling with me about the Black Forest, shall be taxed but little longer. The driest sermon, the dullest page, the longest lane, all have an end. Yet my last days in the Black Forest were not the least enjoyed; the scenes I passed through not the least worthy of note. It is well that last impressions should be peculiarly pleasant. They gild all that has gone before, whether of good or ill. The fine sunset of an especially lovely day in our life, lingers long in the memory; often is destined to fade only with life itself.

## ON BOARD THE "EAGLE."

THE clock had struck eleven. We were still sitting on the hearthrug in our chamber, Mary and I, over the remains of the wood fire that had sparkled and cracked in the huge old fireplace, filling the room with its light and warmth, but was now reduced to a few bright coals, which cast occasional glimmerings of fitful light over the low ceiling of the spacious room. We had been talking, instead of undressing; and, under the influence of the bright fire, the talk had been gay and frolicsome, so, under the shade of the dying fire, our conversation became more subdued and sober.

There was a slight tap at the door, which startled us, and Aunt Eliza's bright old face peeped in.

"Why, girls, not in bed yet?"

"Oh, Aunt Eliza, Frances was beginning to tell me a ghost story; one she read to-day in a periodical," exclaimed Mary.

"But it was a very stupid story," I put in, "and it turned out in the end to be no ghost at all. Could not you tell us one, Aunt Eliza? A real one? It is just the hour for it."

Mrs. H. came forward and sat down in the low dimity-covered chair. She had a sad, grave look upon her face.

"I don't know that I can tell you a ghost story, Frances: some people ridicule the very thought of ghosts; but I can tell you something that happened to myself. It is perfectly true, and you can call it what you please."

Never a more honest-hearted, truthful woman lived than Aunt Eliza H.; and so we knew that what she was about to say *was* true.

"Well," she began, quietly at first, but with an earnest tremulousness in her voice as she progressed, that showed time had not obliterated traces of the excitement she must have experienced at the period, "perhaps you have heard that in the years gone by, when we were out in the West, your mother's uncle, my husband, had a little controversy about some land, lying on a part of the Mississippi river, which, after much delay, it was agreed by the parties, should be settled by arbitration."

"All that long while ago, Aunt Eliza!" interrupted Mary.

"Yes, my dear, all that long while ago; long before either of you were born. In consequence of this decision, your Uncle James had to journey to G., the spot where the land lay, and where he would probably have to remain for a week or two, for the case was both complicated and difficult. I had a good head for accounts and for classification, and had been of much use to my husband in that way ever since our marriage; he, though an active and clever manager of his estate, hated its accounts, and was naturally careless into the

bargain, and he used laughingly to say we ought to have changed places. He insisted upon my accompanying him to G., declaring he should get into a fog with the law papers unless I went, and never get out of it again. I was willing enough to go, only I did not much like leaving my children, who were very young then, and my large household of servants."

"And did you go, aunt?"

"Yes, my dear, I went. When a husband's interests pull you one way, and other interests pull the other, I think it is a woman's duty to choose those of her husband. Well, to make my story short, I went with him, leaving the house and the children and the servants to take care of themselves and each other. The day before we left, I went to the town, three or four miles distant, to see Mrs. D., an intimate friend, to tell her where I was going, and to ask her to drive over to the plantation once in a while, to look how things might be going on; which she readily promised to do. She and I were the dearest and closest friends possible to be in this world, Frances; I have never had another like her."

Aunt Eliza put her hand before her eyes, and held it there for a moment. Then resumed with a sigh.

"We went to G. by land, driving; a disagreeable journey of two days: but my husband wanted to see a settler who lived on the road. We found G. the dirtiest, most uncomfortable place imaginable, and had to take up our abode at a miserable tavern, for we could get no better accommodation. However, travellers in those days in America could not be fastidious, and we made the best of it. I set to work, making a memoranda for the umpire, copying testimony, and helping all I could to 'get order out of the chaos' of an old, unsettled, badly-managed partnership. On the second Saturday night, I lay down on the hard tavern bed, pretty well worn out with the kind of work which is distasteful to most women, but was not so to me."

"And how was the case decided?"

"Oh, my dears, wait. Early on Sunday morning—it was about ten days after we got there—I awoke before it was light, with a strange impression that I was wanted at home—that something was wrong there. You are looking at me, Frances; with surprise, I suppose. All I can tell you is, that what I say is strictly true. It was a most anxious, restless *conviction* that had seized hold of me. I could not account for it; I could not drive it away. Something or other was amiss at home, and I was wanted there.

"'You must let me go, James,' I said to my husband, awaking him in the glimmering dawn of the winter morning.

"But he only laughed at me. The more I urged it, the more he laughed, saying it was only a dream, which must have left a disagreeable impression on me. I hardly knew what to do. Had I insisted upon going he would not have held out against it; but one

hardly likes to take an unusual and inconvenient step in obedience to a mere fancy. I could have gone, you understand; I mean that there were means that day to allow of it; for a passenger steam-boat would touch at G. in about an hour's time, which would take me home by night, and I could get ready for it if I made haste. I did not make ready. While shilly-shallying, as we say, miserably undecided what I ought to do, the minutes passed on, the boat came and passed, and it was too late. But now, whether my not going had increased the impression of something being wrong, I cannot tell; all I know is, that I grew insupportably troubled, and, after a most uncomfortable day, I wound it up with a long fit of tears. James grew uncomfortable at that, and said I should go the next morning."

"And did you go, Aunt Eliza?"

"Oh, yes. About ten o'clock a large boat, called the *Eagle*, stopped at G. on her downward weekly trip. The clerk, or purser, came ashore to receive some freight. He was a very little man, slightly deformed in the back, but with one of the nicest countenances I ever saw, and a gentle voice and manner. My husband, who knew him, put me under his charge, and we were soon off. We had a good many passengers, but I was too uneasy to make acquaintance with any of them, beyond a few necessary words of civility. I sat in solitary silence all day; and as the night hours drew on and on, I grew more anxious, more nervous. We called at different places, and nearly all the passengers by degrees left the boat; but two or three gentlemen remained, who were on deck, smoking. I was by myself in the long, dreary saloon, its sole occupant. A cabin-boy passed along, silently extinguishing all the lights except one burner in each chandelier. I knew I should reach home about midnight, and of course I might have lain down until then; but sleep was gone far away from me. On one of the tables was a Bible; I opened it, and tried to read a chapter—tried to get a little of God's blessed comfort into my uneasy heart: but, do as I would, I could not concentrate my thoughts.

"I closed the book, and looked up and down. There was not a soul visible in the long cabin of that boat; which seemed to me then, and seems to me still, the longest boat I ever was on. At the further end was a piano between the two doors that opened upon the guards, or otherwise—I never knew where. An 'Annual,' as certain choice books were called in those days, lay on the sofa. I tried to look at the engravings, and mechanically turned the leaves, but I literally saw nothing.

"At last, as a next resort—I couldn't sit still, I couldn't read, I couldn't sleep—I got up and walked to the end of the cabin. I turned to walk back again, when, behold! standing before the doorway I have mentioned, the one on the left of the piano, was Mrs. D. I stood still, thinking the light must deceive me. But no, it was truly Mrs. D., the same light dress upon her that she wore the day we

parted—a dress I knew well and had seen her wear many times: a white Indian foulard, trimmed with light green satin—the same sweet smile upon her face. But the smile then had been gay; now it was mournfully sad with a shade of reproach in it. Her hand was extended, as though in greeting: and the thought came rushing into my mind that she had come to meet me to break to me some dire calamity that had happened in my home: totally losing sight, in my confusion, of the question—how had she got on board? She had on no bonnet, no out-of-door things of any kind; her fair and abundant hair was disposed as usual. I was perhaps twenty feet off, but my eyes were rivetted upon her. I quickened my step, my eye brightened, my lips were forming words of affection. I put forth my hand, and, as I thought, touched her. A thrill went through me like what would be imparted by sudden contact with cold, burnished brass. My hand had touched the bolt of the door—the door being, as before, closely shut; ay, and locked. Mrs. D. was not there. *No one* was there. The cabin was empty!

"I heard my own heart beat like a drum, as I sank, appalled, upon the sofa. A voice roused me: I suppose I was looking white.

"'Is anything the matter with you, madam?'

It was the voice of the civil clerk. It seems he had come into the saloon behind me as I turned. I gasped out 'No.'

"'But there is, I think,' he continued in his compassionate voice. 'You seem painfully nervous?'

"'Did you see any lady in the cabin when you came in?' I asked, trying to steady my trembling lips.

"'Any lady!' he echoed in surprise. 'No, madam, certainly not.'

"'There,' I said, pointing to the left-hand door. 'She was standing there. Or I fancied so.'

"'Ay, madam, it must have been fancy. We have not any lady on board but yourself: they have all landed. Not a female of any sort.'

"'I wish I was at home! Can you tell me what time it is?'

"He pulled out his watch and looked at it. 'It is just past ten,' he said: 'three or four minutes past it.'

"I could see that he believed I felt lonely and nervous. So he sat down on the opposite seat, talking, and trying to interest me. I answered 'yes' and 'no' mechanically, but I had not the remotest idea of what the poor man was saying. A question kept ringing in my ears, surging in my brain—what was the meaning of that figure I had seen?—and I felt nearly persuaded that Mrs. D. *was* on board; but that for some reason she had concealed herself from me. Could it be that she had worse tidings for me than she dared to tell? Had all my little ones been taken from me by some overwhelming calamity? Had an earthquake laid the house in ruins? Had ——

"'We shall be late to-night,' said the clerk, interrupting my gloomy presages. 'We had so many places to stop at to-day and hindered

more time than we ought at most of them It does happen sometimes.'

"'Late?' I repeated.

"'By pretty near an hour, madam. We ought to touch at your place, Mrs. H., before midnight; instead of that, it will be close upon one o'clock.'

"Three hours to wait yet! Three long mortal hours before my fears could be confirmed—or laid at rest!—My dears," added Aunt Eliza, dropping her voice, "for years after, when I recalled what those hours of suspense were to me, I turned sick.

"'Are you sure that no other lady is on board?' I again asked of the clerk.

"'Quite sure, madam,' he answered. 'Every one has been landed.

"'Do you chance to know Mrs. D.—wife of Senator D.?'

"'Oh yes,' he said. 'She and the Senator went up with us last fall, and came back with us the following week.'

"'It was Mrs. D. I thought I saw: who was standing there. She held out her hand to me!'

"The clerk shook his head. 'All fancy, madam; nothing else. Perhaps you had been dozing and were thinking of her.'

"I shut my eyes. He supposed I might be inclined to doze again, and stole noiselessly out of the cabin. Two or three times he looked in as the time went on, but did not disturb me again.

"At length the boat's shrill whistle announced my proximity to home. The whistle and the bell made a fearful din. I put on my bonnet and went on deck. It was just one o'clock, that witching hour, when the boat stopped in front of our house. John, our attached negro servant, was running down the path with a lantern. He always had to meet this Monday's boat, for it generally brought parcels of some kind or other for us.

"'Precious late dis night,' he called out. 'What is dere come?'

"*I* had come: and John looked beyond measure astonished to see me. 'All well at home, John?' I asked as I landed: and I knew not how I got the words out.

"'All well, missis,' he said, in his cheery voice.

"'*All* well, did you say,' I repeated, as we walked on to the house. 'The—the children, John?'

"'All quite well, missis.'

"Now, what had my fears meant?—whither had they flown? 'And Mrs. D., John?' I went on. 'Do you know whether she is at home?'

"The man's tones dropped to a sad whisper—as if some fear assailed him. 'O, Missis D., she is very bad, missis; doctors think she die. Cassie, she been over dere all day.'—And at that moment, as if speaking of Cassie, who was my nurse, had brought her to the spot, she appeared at the hall door. 'Ah, Cassie just got back,' said John: 'me thought dem were wheels I heard.'

"'Cassie,' I said, 'how is Mrs. D.?'

"'Oh, poor Mrs. D.! she just dead, missis. She die just as clock strike ten.'

"I could not answer. I was shivering all over.

"'She took ill yesterday, Sunday, at day-break,' continued Cassie, the tears running down her pale cheeks, for she was only half-caste. 'She cry out for you all day, missis, all day, all day. I go over dis morning, when they tell me dat, and I stay till the end.'

"'Did she cry out for me to-day, also?

"'No, only yesterday, missis. All night, all day; dis day, she worse; she make no cry for nobody. She wake up, like, on the stroke o' ten, and she raised her head and look all round the room, and look at us, at one of us after de other, as if she look for some one not dere; and den in a moment she was gone.'"

"Oh, Aunt Eliza! Can this be true?"

"I have told you it is true," she said, getting up to kiss us both: "and it is quite time you went to bed."

"But—stay one instant longer, aunt," pleaded Mary. "Did you ever have another experience like that? Ever feel that you were unaccountably wanted somewhere?"

"Never since. One such experience is enough in a life-time."

"Or—see another ghost, aunt?" I put in.

"Never another, Frances; never another. I do not take upon myself to maintain, I told you, that it was a ghost I saw then. The world is sceptical on these points, you know. Good night, my dears."

But, talking together in solemn whispers as we undressed, Mary and I, we asked each other what else it could have been.

# BITTER SWEET.

## I.

A SYMPHONY of sound and light and scent. A voice of many birds twittering delicately to each other from newly-built nests, amid boughs that swayed to and fro in the wind, and shook their latest buds into leaf and blossom. Into the woodland from far below came a murmur of waves trailing on a shingly beach, and mingling with this murmur, the talk and laughter of the fishermen mellowed by distance. Right down through the sloping woodland a brooklet leapt tinkling and gurgling to the sea.

The dim fragrance and dappled lights and pleasant sounds of the day made a threefold joy to a young girl who stood beneath the trees in the April noon. She stood on a part of the slope whence the trees had drawn back a little, and the light fell about her just beyond the verge of the shadow. Round her feet were dead leaves and living flowers, and soft green mosses full of the sweet rain that had fallen all the previous night. With one hand she shaded her eyes, the other was uplifted to tend back a branch which had barred the open space. Her hair was blown in a brown cloud about her face, and her hazel eyes shone with a serious joy beneath the shading hand.

For the first time in her life she was tasting that singular gladness which comes to mind and body, when alone with nature in spring, after a long illness. To this full content of hers, all the long hours of fevered tossing to and fro, followed by tedious weeks of convalescence, were but a background.

And now into her loneliness there came another human presence —a young man, carelessly whistling, treading gaily over moss and flower till he reached the rivulet and paused on the farther side, looking at the tall, slim figure in the soft grey gown, crowned by the brown hair and wistful face. Just one moment, and he turned off a little higher up and sprang across the stream. Only one look, and there might have been no second; their lives might have glided apart for ever, but for an accident—or what we call accident; which is really a strong link in many a chain of life. As his foot touched the bank he slipped on the damp earth, spraining his ankle in the fall. He drew himself into a sitting posture and leant against a tree, faint with pain. The young girl came quickly towards him. "I will run and get help," she said, and meeting his grateful look for a moment, went quickly along the path that led towards Cloverleigh, the village where she and her father were staying. At a turning, she met a tall scholarly-looking man.

"I was looking for you, Margaret. Are you wise to go bareheaded, my child?" he said anxiously.

"My hat fell into the brook, and it is so mild. But, oh! papa, there is a gentleman hurt down there. He has sprained his ankle and cannot walk." And she waved her hand towards the woods below. They found him faint and white; but he made light of his suffering as they helped him through the fringe of apple and pear trees to his lodging in Cloverleigh.

II.

Most of our lives are Bitter-Sweet; but if there is one period in it when the bitter and the sweet are superlative, it is when Love takes possession of soul and body as instruments whereon to play his mighty preludes.

Margaret Townsend had lived alone almost all her life, with her father, a quiet student, loving but his daughter and his books, and so her life was full of associations but not of friends. None of the bloom had been worn off her soul by that playing at love called flirtation. She had read, with a certain solemnity, some old books wherein mention was made of men who had died and done other things for love; and she may have had dreams on the subject, but filmy and shifting as dreams generally are.

Her father had taught her Greek, and so "she chanced upon the poets," and their thoughts had given flavour to her own. Some time before this had come illness; it had seemed at one moment as if she must cross the narrow bound of Time into the wide spaces of Eternity: but slowly death had let go his hold, and she was well enough now to enjoy the change to the quaint Devonshire fishing village, perched in the rift of a headland among ancestral trees and bowers of ash and apple and pear.

It is unique, this village, with its hundred steps leading down to the quay and the shingly shore. The houses rise one above the other, and the quaint rooms in them are let in summer to visitors with good walking powers. Its only inn is a temple of bric-a-brac, and, in summer, is crowded with pilgrims visiting at one of the shrines of nature. In this sequestered solitude, the father and daughter and Dr. John Enderby were at present the only strangers, and the young doctor, after two or three days, limped into Margaret's sunlit sitting-room, into which the light filtered through a network of budding apple boughs. Here he would sit and watch Margaret at work, or listen to her as she read some old-world book to her father, her fresh young voice contrasting with the oft-times crabbed style; and, as he thus watched her, she grew inexpressibly pleasant to him. Pleasant, and that was all.

But to Margaret? Without one word of warning, had come the crowning affection of her life. "Heaven lies about us in our infancy," then fades away. But once more it lies about man and woman

in the mellow time of youth with a beauty that baby eyes never yet beheld; and earth borrows of this heavenly light. Did ever such sunlight pass through the rosy film of the apple blossoms that nestled against the wall and made a bower before Margaret's window? And as for the blue bay gleaming below,—was it really so cruel after all? Did so many husbands and fathers and sons lie tossing in its depths? It looked so caressing, washing the feet of the red cliffs where the greenery crept down to meet it.

John was free to come and go as he liked in the blossom-screened room, holding learned converse with Mr. Townsend, meeting his daughter in the woods, now fully leafed, sometimes helping her over the rocks in search of anemones. On fine evenings the three would sit on the little semi-circular pier that enclosed the "quay pule," and watch the sunset fading and the darkness nestling down among the wooded headlands, and the great evening star suddenly appearing in the blue above the paling primrose that touched the water. After that the sky would swiftly fill with stars, and the moon would spring into the airy silence, and her light would penetrate sky and sea and cliff-hung village, the lights would appear one by one in the windows above, and they would climb homeward.

All this fed the warm friendliness he felt for her, which is often mistaken for love. The fragrance of her life filled his imagination, and he determined to make her his wife. But of that delicious agony, that glorious fear that makes pallid the face of the lover, the void in the life that must be filled by the presence of a beloved woman—what did he know? Nothing.

His nature was as yet cold, hers was all aglow. She was one of those women, passionate, yet sweet and pure, with sensitive bodies that quiver with pain at any strong emotion. If she had never seen him again, it is improbable that she would ever have cared for another; perhaps she would have waited in eternity for the sequence of that first glance of his.

They lingered on till the honeysuckle wooed the meadow-sweet in the deep lanes above the village, and the young summer was in its beauty. Then there came a moment when the two being alone in the woodland path overhanging the sea, John asked Margaret to be his wife. It was the sweetest time of the afternoon, just before sunset, when the day has lost its weariness and the sky is calm, and the sunshine is dimmed by a soft haze.

Mr. Townsend had left them in order to write a letter which he had forgotten, and the others had sauntered towards the village in dreamy silence. Then she became aware that he was asking her to be his wife, telling her that she was the sweetest woman he had ever seen. Whence then her sudden shrinking from him, as in fear?

"I am not good enough," she cried. She was afraid of her joy, for she was a timid woman, but in the midst of his wooing he was vexed at her humility, not understanding it, for he was only offering

her a scanty armful of first-fruits, and she was returning him the full harvest of her soul, though she did not know its value. He drew her to him and kissed the brown head and laid it on his breast. She began to cry—she had been so greedy of joy lately, and here was its perfection!

And he?—well, it was the sweetest hour he had ever passed in his life. This girl, with her simple dress and manner, and her serious brown eyes and undertone of joyfulness about her, satisfied the more spiritual side of his nature. And yet she was not the ideal of his past, which ideal had been compounded of soft-voiced Cordelia, passionate Juliet, bright Rosalind, witty Beatrice and dear Desdemona —in fact, of all the sweets of many natures compacted into one.

She was not his heroine, but he was her hero, and her gladness inclined towards sadness; for a true woman sees herself valueless at the moment she believes that the "man of men" sees in her a precious jewel.

"Are you sorry?" he asked, half jestingly.

"Sorry!" she said, and, with a frank yet coy gesture, she nestled close to his heart.

## III.

Windborough is a country town, seated in the midst of a smiling plain which stretches to a line of low wooded hills on the north, and loses itself in the far horizon in every other direction. It is a sleepy town, full of old houses and old traditions, and prides itself rather on its ruins than on its famous woollen manufacture. It is built in the form of a cross—indeed, its main street is called Crossgate. In one of the arms of the cross—the one towards Woodleigh, with its famous old castle—are the best houses, in which the smaller gentry and the professional men live.

At the end of the Woodleigh Road was Dr. Enderby's house, large and old-fashioned; and hither he brought his wife Margaret not long after their first meeting in the Cloverleigh woods. It was a change from the intense quiet of her girlhood to a large circle of friends, and a few secret enemies. But she was John's wife, and her sweet gaiety filled his house with sunshine; and she shaped herself a home in all gladness. The old red-brick house had pleasant rooms, filled with comfortable furniture, softly cushioned chairs, and low tables, and plenty of flowers; there were no dingy-looking dados, no sad-looking discoloured blossoms worked on kitchen towels. As Margaret was not æsthetic, she preferred cheerful chintz and soft velvet.

Her own sanctum was a small room overlooking the garden, and furnished with soft shades of green. There were oak shelves filled with her favourite books, a writing-table, and a few low chairs. At the window were white lace curtains, and on the mantelpiece a jar of Venetian glass that looked like a fragment of sunset. Near the window was a stand of flowers that varied according to the seasons.

In spring there were primroses and violets—even a few tulips; in summer, roses and mignonette; in autumn and winter, ferns and mosses, with perhaps a red geranium to light them up. Outside in the garden was a great elm overhanging the lawn, and the flower-beds were as old-fashioned as the house.

In this room of Margaret's, John Enderby loved to rest in his intervals of leisure, watching his wife with an interest and a strange timidity that grew deeper day by day. Poor Margaret felt him farther from her, and a shadow fell across her life that the birth of her little son could not wholly chase away. When the child was about nine months old, it happened that she was often alone, for it was an unhealthy autumn, and Dr. Enderby's services were in great requisition, not only among the rich, but also among the poor—for he was gentle as well as skilful. Now and then he would come in and resume his old habit of silently watching and listening to her talk about little Jack. How she loved that child! What sweet music his tiny fingers discoursed on that mother's heart-strings!

One afternoon her husband came in as she was sitting with the child on her knee—a bright, fair-haired, brown-eyed boy, very like his father. The baby stretched out his dimpled arms to his father, then with a child's mischief withdrew them, and hid his face on his mother's bosom with a cooing laugh. She bent her head down on the fluffy curls, and caught his little bare feet in her hand (he had pulled off his shoes and socks, the tiny rogue!), and she kissed the rosy toes with lovely mother-worship.

"Look, John," she said; "isn't he the most wonderfully sweet child, this precious baby? What should we do without him?"

She was flushed and laughing, arms and heart full too; but a sharp pang flashed through him.

He answered quietly, "Yes, he is a fine boy for his age," and, bending down, kissed him; but he went away after that without further speech. It often happened so now, and Margaret could not divine the cause; so she was hurt, and turned more and more to the baby for comfort.

On this occasion the doctor went to his study, locked the door, and sat down to wrestle with himself, also to take stock of his forces for that wrestling.

Terrible and sweet revelation to the man! He had, as the phrase goes, fallen in love—fortunately with his wife. This, then, was the meaning of his silence, his jealousy, of the tearing away of his old pleasant friendliness towards her. This love of his was no flame that would flash and die out, but the strong white heat, the very soul of the heavenly fire.

He remembered now how she had said, "I am not worthy." Now he understood,—she had loved him at that time—how far away it seemed—with the whole force of her being; and he,—well, with self-depreciation and some well-deserved self-blame, he saw his blind-

ness and the terrible risk he had run. He wanted only his wife, his Margaret; but what if he, Margaret's husband, had never felt this delight in her? Might he not have met some other woman for the sake of whom he would possibly have been tempted to repent his marriage?

He was a good man, upright and true; but he had often played at love before his marriage, "ere life-time and love-time were one," and he was being punished now; for he doubted whether her love had not declined into that friendliness which he had given her before, and she was absorbed in the child.

Was she, then, one of those women in whom the instinct of motherhood is stronger than all other? He worshipped her now with the full sacred passion of his manhood, and was his own child to come between, and shut him away from her? She would be always sweetly dutiful, he knew that,—but duty, wifely duty! A man is nothing if he does not want more than that; and what was his life to be if she and the child dwelt apart in a little Paradise of their own? He was jealous of his own child. At this point the man threw himself on his knees and finished his conflict there, and it was well for him that he did so.

## IV.

The very names of Eliphaz the Temanite, and Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite, carry us back in thought to the world's dawn; but their modern antitypes are to be found everywhere: in the fullest perfection amongst women, sad to say, and more perceptible in a country town than in a city.

And when poor Job—feminine Job especially—is sitting in the ashes of desolation, then do they, softly seated on the cushion of self-righteousness, proceed to comment disparagingly on the sufferer's past behaviour.

Now, Eliphaz and Co. were not wanting in Windborough society, and in the case of John and Margaret soon perceived "the rift in the lute;" and being low, mean souls, they set to work to find a low, mean cause for it, having no idea of the higher love between man and woman.

They were three middle-aged spinsters, who had failed to enter the holy estate of matrimony, in spite of an earnest desire to do so. When the roses of youth and riches were no longer for them, they would fain have culled the chrysanthemums of life's autumn; but, alas! even those sad and scentless flowers were denied them. So these three had been soured, or rather were unloved through a certain sourness of nature which the masculine portion of mankind had had sagacity enough to perceive and to avoid. Miss Moss, Miss Brown, and Miss Jones were friends, and much of the mischief in Windborough might be traced to them. For instance, had they not discovered Mr. Blight the curate's shameful flirtation with little Miss

Wilson? and here was Dr. Enderby taking to his old flirting ways again! If he had married a sensible, intellectual person, she might have cured him by carefully looking after him; but now his attending the meetings of the Book Club without his wife, and walking home with little Miss Fry and her Quaker mother, boded no good. So said they, shaking their heads. This was after morning service on Sunday, and they resolved that on Monday morning, while the doctor was away on his rounds, they would call and enlighten his wife. "It will do her good, poor thing," they remarked.

So the three came on Monday morning, and, after a few commonplaces, Miss Moss, who was a faded beauty, and therefore the bitterest, began.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Enderby, we can see that you are suffering, poor dear, and no wonder!"

Margaret looked at them, bewildered. "I am quite well," she said.

"But about the doctor, my dear; we have known him so long, and understand his ways. If you had been a little more experienced you would have looked better after your husband."

"But he is not ill," answered the wife, still more bewildered.

"Not in body," remarked Miss Brown, with a significant smile; "but in mind, we mean; he pays great attention to the Frys next door, you know."

"And Miss Fry is very pretty," added Miss Jones.

If she had not been so angry, Margaret would have laughed; John had walked home with their neighbours twice, and she was very fond of them. John might not love her; that she had found out, she thought; but she knew him to be the very soul of honour. She was generally so quiet that when her anger blazed out they were startled.

"Will you be so good as to leave my husband's affairs alone?" she said. "If you wish to be wicked, there is no need to show such bad taste as to come here and endeavour to do harm."

And then they, feeling that for once they had been vanquished, quickly took their departure. But their words had left a sting behind them.

Was it so visible, then, even to these gossips—the fact that she had found out some time ago, namely, that she was not to him all that he was to her? When she had discovered it she had determined to take thankfully what he could give; but, alas! beloved, who will be grateful for a few crumbs seeing a full meal beyond? The hunger of the soul cannot be stifled; it cries out for food. Well, she tried not to blame him; he had mistaken his feeling for her, and was tired of her; but there was her baby.

She never told her husband of that visit, though she believed he regretted his marriage; she only clung to the child—such a frail little reed to lean upon. And one day it broke.

It was a Sunday—one of those sweet days in the late autumn which nature saves out of the summer. The trees had lost their

leaves, and the sunshine showed all their delicate irregularity—their beauty of mere form, which had been hidden by the foliage. The golden asters and red geraniums still brightened the sheltered garden. A ball was lying on the frosty grass, but the tiny fingers that had played with it would never touch it more, for Baby Jack was going fast to a Land in which, let us not say there are no toys for the angel children. You remember Martin Luther's letter to his boy Hans, in which he tells him of a lovely Paradise, with golden toys, whips, and drums, and childish delights.

This little child was dying of croup. His mother could only hold the little form on her knee, while John knelt beside her trying useless remedies to comfort her. At last he stood still, looking down sorrowfully at the signs of ebbing life.

Suddenly he knelt and touched the little clenched hand with his lips, and heavy tears plashed down upon it—his dear little boy; it was hard!

Margaret bent forward. "You do love him, John!" She was jealous for him that he should have his full share of love before he went. John understood, and his look answered her. What instinct had made her ask?

The fluttering breath grew shorter and shorter; it was near the end now, and little Jack opened his eyes and said, for the first and last time, quite clearly, "Mamma." That was all she was to have—the one word, and the angels would have the rest. Terrible, awfully mysterious death had borne away the spirit of the babe, and left only the little body cold and white as a snow-wreath; but a smile hovered on the tiny face.

At that moment the bells rang out for morning service, filing the clear air with their solemn merriment.

"And the bells of the City rang again," said John, softly. Margaret could weep then, and the nurse took the dead child from her arms, and went softly out, shutting the door.

## V.

So John comforted his wife, but her grief grew silent. She was gentle to him, but her thoughts were with the dead child. She told herself that it was better that he should be with the angels, and he would sing hymns, and perhaps play in the golden streets; but she had a hurt feeling, for he would never be her own baby again. Mothers' hearts are hungry things, and she felt that she had nothing left. Her husband divined this mixed feeling, but in the shyness of his new love could not penetrate her silence.

After a while her strength failed; and, in great anxiety, he brought her back to Cloverleigh, to the old rooms that had been bowered by the apple blossoms; but blossoms and birds were all gone now. Here Margaret grew restless; her thoughts turned from little Jack for

the first time, and the afternoon after they came, she wandered out by herself to the woods above the house. The sun was shining, and there were one or two late daisies in the grass. She stooped and gathered them. Her baby had been fond of them, and she had made him so many chains of them in the past summer, and he had broken them, with his little coo just like a bird.

She went on, dry-eyed and desolate.

She started. Here was the place where John had asked her to be his wife, and with a pang she remembered the intensity of her joy. Ah! how the petals had fallen from the flower. It had been unjust of John to take her without loving her. He had sought her and wooed her, and now she was so lonely.

She heard his step, and turned to hide from him; but the trees were bare now. Half curiously she looked at him. He had not seen her yet, for his eyes were bent on the ground. Unconscious of her presence, he took no pains to hide his despondency, and she could see how grief-worn was the handsome, kindly face. Contemplating him thus she forgot herself, and the old strong love shone in her eyes. He looked up, and saw her pale and slim in her black dress; but there was that in those eyes which drew him to her to murmur in her ear how much he loved her, and she turned to him as she had never done before. "I am not worthy, dear," he said, having also learnt the divine humility.

So the bitter changed entirely to sweet; not suddenly, for it took some time for Margaret to lose her jealousy of the angels. And that time was chronicled in her soul as, "the winter our baby died, and I first knew how dear I was to John."

## THE FULL MAY MOON.

It was in the pleasant spring-time,
When trees are budding green,
And violets scent the meadows—
It was on a Sunday e'en;
The service of praise was over
(The parson had kept them late),
When a maiden bade her lover
"Good night," at her garden gate.

"The moon's at the full this evening,"
She said, "at the full, at ten,
And those who are watching and wishing
May have what they wish for then.
And I will watch from my window,
And wish—what I will not tell."
Said he, "And at ten this evening,
I will watch and wish as well."

And at ten they both were watching;—
Each knew that the other's eyes
Were fixed on the fateful planet
That shone in the southern skies.
Each knew what the other wished for,
Though neither had said a word;
Each knew the other was praying,
Though neither the other heard.

But a cloud came sailing slowly
Across the sky, apart,
Till it hid the moon, and its shadow
Fell on each beating heart.
And they knew it was an omen
To the love, so true and fond,
A shadow of evil coming
In the life that lay beyond.

And time has passed and is passing,
And both are growing old,
Yet neither heart has forgotten,
And neither heart is cold.
But still they are waiting and wishing
For a day that comes not soon,
When, hand in hand, together
They may gaze on the full May Moon.

J. T. Burton Wollaston.

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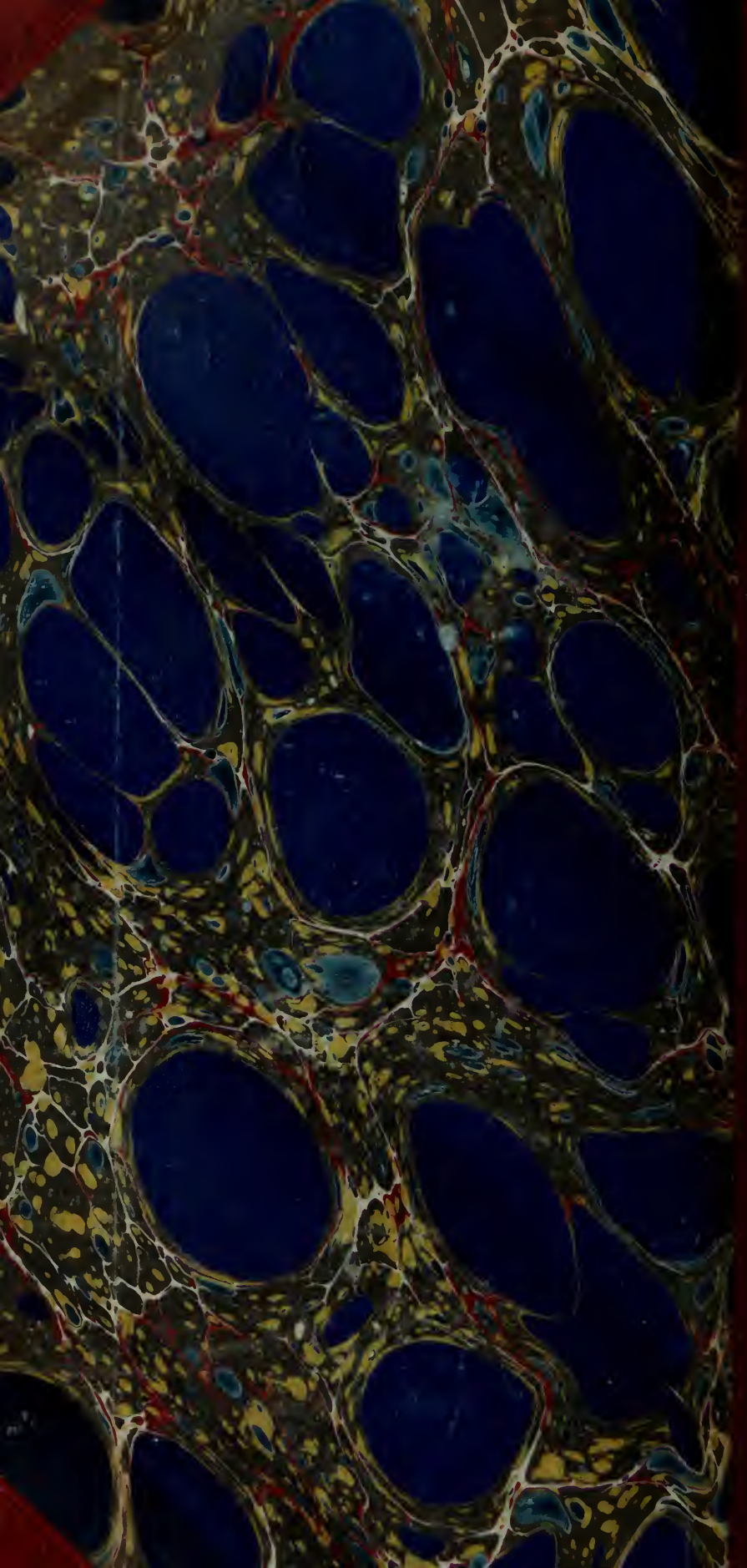
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